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Renegotiating Identities and Re-Imagining Lives: Exploring the Migration Experiences of Afghan Women

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of women who fled from war and unrest in Afghanistan. My objectives were to relate the migration experiences of these women to the ways in which they renegotiated their identities and re-imagined their lives in Canada. I present narratives of the women's stories of migration, the most significant aspects of identity that they renegotiated and the factors that enabled as well as constrained this process. This discussion is framed within the postcolonial theoretical concept of a liminal space as an in-between space in which migrants can renegotiate identities and engender new perspectives. These spaces have been theorized as being generative and empowering, and although the findings of this study corroborate these characteristics of the liminal space, they also demonstrate that the structural and systemic constraints faced by the women during the settlement process make the space of identity renegotiation a bounded liminal space.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Origin of the Study

This research focuses on the experiences of women who fled from war and unrest in Afghanistan and settled in Canada. The objectives of this study are to relate the migration experiences of these Afghan women to the ways in which they renegotiated their identities and re-imagined their lives during the period of resettlement in Canada, and to explore the learning processes associated with the renegotiation of identity.

In my work as a community adult educator, I have been involved in several initiatives to assist women from Afghanistan who had recently arrived in Edmonton. My role was to design, develop and administer programs to help this group of women with their educational and career goals. These programs met with varying levels of 'success.' Through a process of reflection and evaluation of the programs, I became more aware of the complexity of the women's migration experiences and began to wonder how these experiences affected the ways in which the women engaged in the programs we had designed. Questions that arose for me during the program seemed to center on how women's identities shifted and changed through the migration process and through the related processes of learning - these were the questions that provided the impetus for this study.

Context for the Study

The research on issues of international migration has focused on the causes and effects of both forced and voluntary migration but without a sufficient focus on a gender

based analysis of migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Dion & Dion, 2001; Rose, Preston & Dyck, 2002). Rose et al. suggest that a "transnational optic…is needed to examine how gender relations and identities change through the experiences of migration and flight" (p. 13) and to provide a more nuanced perspective of how gender can influence the way in which women experience their social and economic settlement and their civic participation in their country of settlement. As the number of women migrants worldwide continues to rise and women's experiences of migration receive more attention, this gap is starting to be addressed (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). However, much of the research on gender and migration has focused on the structural causes of migration and the systemic constraints that women encounter in their new environments with relatively few qualitative studies that provide an in-depth appreciation of migrant women's narratives and experiences in the process of migration and settlement. Although migrant women may share some common experiences, these experiences will vary by individual and group membership, and by context. The gap in the knowledge of gendered processes of migration can be addressed by investigating the experiences of women from a variety of contexts, taking into account both their individual differences and varied backgrounds.

The process of settlement and adaptation in a new country in which the social, cultural and economic systems are dramatically different from the immigrant women's countries of origin is a complex one and is mediated by both the "context of exit" from the country of origin and the "context of reception" in the home country (Portes & Rumbaut as cited in Espin, 1999, p. 16). The context of exit includes the social, political and economic conditions in the home country preceding the time of migration. For migrants who have left Afghanistan recently, this context includes a considerable period

of political, social and economic instability in Afghanistan as well as time spent as refugees in Pakistan. The context of reception includes immigration and refugee policies in Canada, the expectations, hopes and aspirations of new immigrants as well as the Canadian context in which they are received.

Canada's Immigration and Refugee Policy Act sets out policies for the selection of migrants who wish to settle in Canada. Although the Act is purported to be non-discriminatory and inclusive, the selection criteria for admitting new immigrants are skewed towards 'skilled' migrants, resulting in disadvantages and immigration barriers for women (Boucher, 2007). The focus on criteria such as work experience and language skills excludes women who may have had careers interrupted due to child bearing and child rearing, time spent on domestic work and care giving, and unequal access to education and work opportunities in their home countries. Boucher argues that the premium placed on the economic productiveness of migrants by immigration policies creates discriminatory selection processes that result in systemic inequalities which persist through the process of migration and settlement in the Canadian context.

Immigrants arriving in Canada look forward to a good future for themselves and their families in a peaceful and safe environment. Experiences of migration and settlement however, can be fraught with challenges. These include having to locate, acquire and process information about housing, employment, schools, health care and other immediate needs, and forming new family and social networks (Creese, Dyck & McLaren, 1999). In this new context, the priority for new immigrants is to achieve some level of economic stability, requiring the acquisition of English language skills as well as the necessary skills for continuing or extending their education or for obtaining suitable

employment. During the process of settlement, immigrants often have to contend with multiple barriers including difficulties in having existing skills and credentials recognized, a lack of social capital, limited access to services and resources as well as racial and other forms of discrimination (Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Tastsglou & Preston, 2005; VanderPlaat, 2007; Waters & Teo, 2003).

Along with the myriad challenges of settlement, immigrants also have to contend with a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation of the self. Being in the 'in-between' space of migration results in being "caught between 'here' and 'there'" (Agnew, 2005, p. 14) and creates a kind of double consciousness where immigrants are still attached to the symbols and memories of the homeland and at the same time are renegotiating their participation in the social, economic and political spheres of the new land.

The process of identity negotiation is linked to the process of learning in two ways. First, identity renegotiation can be seen as a process of "learning, unlearning, and relearning who we are" (Flannery, 2002, p. 78). The tensions caused by migration and settlement highlight and accelerate the need for this renegotiation and learning. Second, the identity renegotiation experiences of immigrant women are part of the social context in which the women engage with and participate in formal and nonformal learning (Preece & Walters, 1999). Education programs provided by immigrant service organizations and other agencies can play a role in easing the transition process by providing programs to assist women to navigate the barriers they encounter (Gibb, Hamdon & Jamal, 2008). In my experience with programs for immigrant women, there is a tendency to regard women simply as 'clients,' disembodied from their past experiences and backgrounds. An exploration of the migration experiences of Afghan women can

provide a deeper understanding of the effect that migration and a sense of dislocation have had on their sense of identity, the learning processes associated with their renegotiation of identity, and how these contribute to their settlement experiences in Canada.

Research Questions

The central question of this study is: What is the relationship between the migration experiences of Afghan refugee women in Canada and their process of identity renegotiation? Within this central question are embedded four broad areas of investigation:

- What were the women's pre-migration and post-migration experiences?
- How do women renegotiate their sense of identity in Canada?
- What are the constraints and enablers of the renegotiation of their identity?
- What is the relationship between the process of renegotiation of identity and the formal and informal learning processes women engage in?

Theoretical Framework

The experience of migration can be one of pain and dislocation where migrants are suspended in a state of transition between home and the new land, with no possibility of returning home and a sense of being strangers in the new land. Postcolonial theories have been immensely useful in conceptualizing experiences of the migrant in the diaspora and have provided innovative ways of conceptualizing identities as being hybrid and in a constant state of flux, rather than being unitary, essential and fixed (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b). These hybrid identities are renegotiated in what

Bhabha (1990, 1994) describes as an in-between or liminal space, one of flux and transition. The work of identity renegotiation adds a layer of complexity to the experiences of the new migrant, but also opens up the liminal spaces that allow the renegotiation of identities and the re-imagining of lives.

Although postcolonial theories have provided useful frameworks for new ways of understanding identity and hybridity, these theories have also been critiqued for their tendency to generalize and universalize the hybrid subject without sufficient attention to the ways in which race, class and gender mediate the renegotiation of identities in specific contexts (Loomba, 2005). The frameworks used by Western feminism could possibly be used to add another layer of analysis to postcolonial frameworks but these frameworks have the tendency to view 'Third World Women' as a "singular, monolithic subject" (Mohanty, 2004, p. 17). Oppressive structures cannot be examined independently of their social, cultural and historical contexts, and empirical studies based on Western frameworks force women into preconceived and artificial frames that do not provide a deep, nuanced and contextual understanding of women's lives. Mohanty (2002) argues that a carefully situated local analysis that accounts for women's lived realities is needed in order to resist the ethnocentric biases and "'globalized' representations of women" that "stand in for the contradictions and complexities of women's lives and roles" (p. 527). These analyses can help ensure that the lived realties of women are viewed in the contexts that shape their experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the migration narratives of women who fled Afghanistan for Canada. Narratives are often used to focus on a local and particular experience in a

specific space, time and context, but they can also be used to contribute to both small and large scale social change (Chase, 2005). This can occur at two levels. First, the act of listening to the stories of a marginalized and silenced group can be the start of a process of understanding another perspective and promoting empathy with the group since "taking the other's perspective is a necessary step in constructive social change" (Frank, as quoted in Chase, 2005, p. 668). I hoped that this study would provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the migration experiences of Afghan women, as well how these experiences affect their settlement process in Canada.

Second, the collective stories of a group can help the listener make the connection between individual experiences and the broader social forces that have contributed to conditions of marginalization by situating the stories within a social, political and historical context. Dyck and McLaren (2004) emphasize that research stories that document the settlement experiences of immigrant and refugee women in Canada "are critical to opening up the categories that underpin policy-making and have consequences for how immigrants are positioned in relation to social and material resources" (p. 529). Although the audience for these stories may sometimes be hostile, presenting the stories of socially marginalized groups is a way of creating a space for "talking back" to those in power. These collective stories, when contextualized and interpreted by the researcher, can "reveal the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives…and help to open up possibilities for social change" (Chase, 2005, p. 668).

By exploring how a specific group of migrants renegotiates their identities, this study has the potential to add to the ongoing discussion of how best to enhance the provision of services to new immigrants. This discussion includes issues of language

acquisition, recognition of education and work experience, matching skills to work opportunities and supporting individuals within the context of their families and communities. The study can provide immigrant service providers and adult educators with theoretical as well as practical strategies for enhancing programs for new immigrants. I hope, therefore, that the results of this study will contribute to creating change on a small scale by providing a clearer understanding of the perspectives of the participants of this study, and on a larger scale by pointing towards policy recommendations, strategies and guidelines that will benefit future newcomers to Canada.

Methodology and Method

In this study I use the methodology of narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology. Narrative inquiry can be used to elicit women's stories about significant events in their lives such as migration, as well as the meaning they ascribe to these events. My task as a researcher is to seek to understand the social, political and historical context for the narratives and to interpret and analyze the narratives using relevant theoretical frameworks.

The data for this study was collected through in-depth narrative interviews conducted in 2007 with four Afghan women living in Canada. Two of the women are in their late twenties and two of them are in their early thirties. The women spent four to five years in Pakistan before migrating to Canada and have been in Canada for six to eight years. With each of the women I conducted two to four interviews and recorded and transcribed our conversations. My objective for the first interview was to solicit stories of the participants' lives in Afghanistan before migration and in subsequent interviews I focused on the women's migration and settlement experiences. However, in keeping with

the narrative inquiry framework, I encouraged each woman to tell her story as she chose to.

Outline of the Study

This chapter provided an introduction to the study by outlining the purpose, origin and context for the study, the method used, and the central research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of the current literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and the methods used for the research. Chapter 4 presents short narratives of each of the participants in the study. In Chapters 5 and 6, I present the findings of the study through the narrative threads or themes that emerged and a discussion of the findings. Chapter 7 is a concluding chapter in which I discuss the implications of the study for the field of adult education, present policy recommendations and make suggestions for further work in this area.

CHAPTER 2:

MIGRATION, IDENTITY AND LEARNING

The literature review for this research encompasses three sections that cover the main areas of concern to this study. In the first section, I provide the context for the participants' pre-migration experiences in Afghanistan and post-migration experiences in Canada. In the second section, I provide a review of the literature on post-colonial theories of diaspora, identity, hybridity and liminality. In the third section, I describe how these theories are linked to the processes of women's formal and informal learning and I include some useful frameworks drawn from the literature on feminist pedagogies.

The Contexts of Migration

The flow of populations between regions of the world continues to increase as people migrate either to seek increased opportunities and better lives, or to flee from their home countries, escaping famine or the global injustices of conflict, war and insecurity, or profound social and economic inequities (Brah, 1996). The journeys of migration are characterized both by the circumstances of their departure as well as the circumstances of their arrival. To historicize the narratives of these journeys, it is necessary to look not only at "*who travels* but *when, how, and under what circumstances*" (Brah, p. 182) since these circumstances affect the everyday lives and experiences of migrants as they settle in a new place. The starting point in understanding the migration experiences of Afghan refugee women is to examine the context of their pre-migration and post-migration experiences. The pre-migration context in Afghanistan includes the social, political and

economic conditions that preceded their forced migration and the post-migration context in Canada includes the opportunities and challenges in the process of settlement.

Pre-migration context of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a land locked country with a population of about 27 million (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2007). The country is divided by the Hindu Kush mountain range and much of the terrain is a mix of mountains and deep valleys. Afghanistan's population is multi-ethnic, comprised of over 50 ethnic groups with the primary ones being Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek. The two main languages are Dari, a variation of Persian, and Pashto. Ninety nine per cent of Afghans are Muslim and religious practices range from more liberal traditions in urban areas to more conservative traditions in rural areas.

The country's strategic location on the overland Silk route before ocean routes were used for trading contributed to ongoing foreign intervention over the years, mainly from the British, the US and the USSR. Years of foreign intervention and accompanying domestic conflict intensified in the 20th century and have resulted in many years of turmoil and war. Large numbers of Afghans have left their home country to escape the unrest, resulting in Afghanistan currently being the origin of the largest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2007). In addition to the refugees that have left the country, there are a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been forced to leave their homes to escape violence and find safety in another city or region in Afghanistan. Although many refugees who left the country have returned to Afghanistan, there are currently approximately 2.1 million Afghan refugees scattered over 71 countries with the largest numbers residing in Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR, 2007). Afghan refugees

began trickling into Canada in the 1980s and these numbers grew in the 1990s as the violence in Afghanistan intensified. By the end of 2006, about 14,000 Afghans had sought refuge in Canada (UNHCR, 2007).

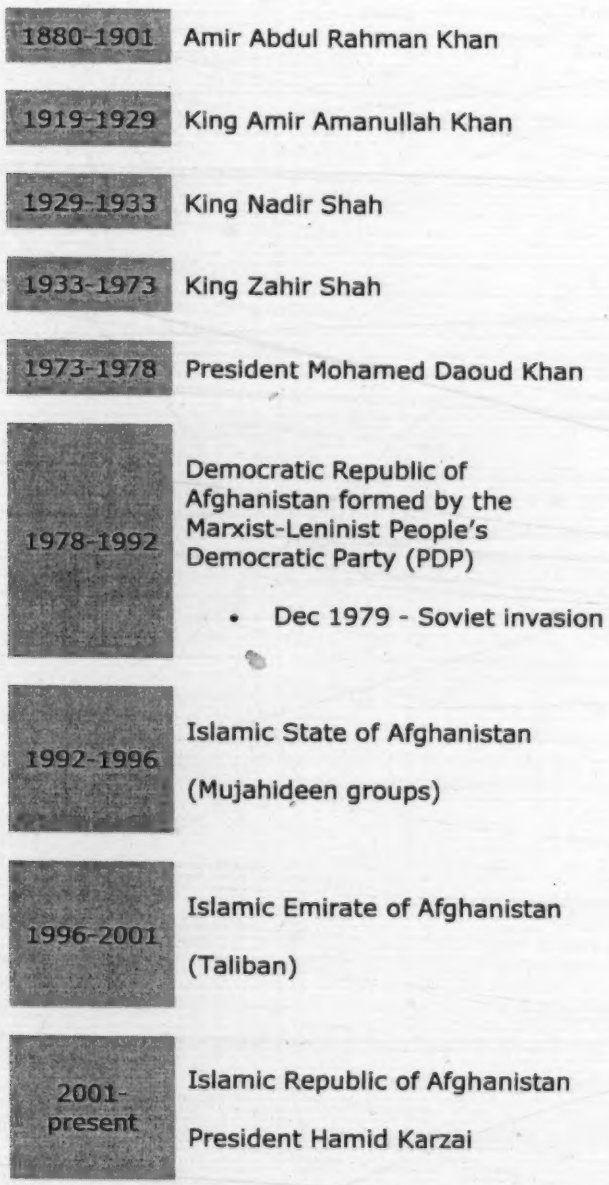

Figure 1: Afghanistan – Political/Historical Timeline

Starting from the late 1800s to the present time, the ongoing efforts of centralized political structures to maintain power over diverse tribes and ethnic groups, and the resulting political instability in Afghanistan has had a profound impact on the lives of women. Women have been subjected to a range of state gender policies that have swung like a pendulum from one extreme to another, moving between attempts at progressive reforms at one end to extreme restrictions on women on the other end (Zulfacar, 2006). Many of these gender policies have been introduced and implemented for political ends rather than in response to improving the everyday lives of women, and without considering the contexts of women's lives. These contexts include their ethnic, tribal, regional, geophysical backgrounds and the social and economic contexts of a particular period in time.

Some of the earliest social reforms that affected women were introduced by the founder of the Afghan state, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, between 1880 and 1901. His goal of establishing a strong central state to wrest power away from tribal groups required support from women and to this end, he encouraged the participation of women in political activities and introduced a number of marriage related reforms. The reforms, however, did not gain wide acceptance and as a result were not sustained after his death in 1901.

The next wave of reforms came during the time of Amir Amanullah Khan in the years between 1919 and 1929. King Amanullah worked to establish a Western-style modern secular state that included the process of social reform, much of which was targeted towards women. The King abolished child marriage, discouraged polygamy and abolished mandatory veiling (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). He encouraged women to participate

in compulsory public education and in higher education and created opportunities for women to become involved in the public sphere. King Amanullah also established women's organizations for vocational and nursing training and more schools in rural areas that would be open to both boys and girls. Although these reforms created opportunities mainly for urban women, they provoked the displeasure of rural tribal and religious leaders and in 1929, the religious establishment forced King Amanullah to resign (Ellis, 2000; Zulfacar, 2006). The next four years under the rule of King Nadir Shah saw another swing in the pendulum of gender politics and a move back to more restrictive policies for women, including a reinstatement of mandatory veiling and suspension of many educational programs for women.

In the years between 1933 and 1973 and especially after 1950, progressive social reforms for women were re-introduced and substantially extended under the rule of King Zahir Shah. In 1964, a new constitution gave women equal rights and the freedom to participate in education and work. The implementation of these reforms accelerated in the 1960s and during those years, many women in urban areas pursued higher education and professional careers and became involved in the political process. When conservative members of parliament attempted to restrict the rights of women, they met with fierce resistance from women through protests and demonstrations (Mogadham, 2002).

The years of King Zahir Shah's reign saw an acceleration of foreign intervention in Afghanistan. The involvement of the US began soon after the First World War and increased in scale after the Second World War with their funding of the Helmand Valley Dam, a massive and long term hydraulic project (Gregory, 2004). The USSR, wanting to establish and maintain some level of influence and control in this region, also started

providing large amounts of funding for various infrastructure and development projects. The role of the USSR increased during the period from 1974 to 1978 when King Daoud Shah was in power and by 1978 the USSR was Afghanistan's main trading partner (Lyon, 2006). The King initiated the strengthening of the Afghan military and invited the US to provide assistance in purchasing arms and providing training. The US, fearing a confrontation with the USSR, refused to provide this aid resulting in an increasingly close relationship between Afghanistan and the USSR in subsequent years.

In 1978, two factions of the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Khalq and the Parcham, overthrew the Daoud regime and declared the creation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The Khalq faction soon gained control of the party and began to initiate and enforce land and social reforms for women (Mogadham, 2002). Equal rights were granted to women and they were encouraged to unveil, to attend school, to pursue higher education and to seek employment in various sectors including those traditionally restricted to men such as the government and the militia. However, these social reforms were made in the midst of brutal retaliations of any resistance to the new party (Gregory, 2004). In addition, the attempted reforms were tenuous since they were still embedded within the patriarchal structures and tribal practices of Afghan society (Zulfacar, 2006). This became apparent when ongoing demonstrations of resistance to the DRA often took the form of anger towards the gender policies of the regime, especially among males in the rural population. Opposition groups continued to challenge the gender policies, especially those related to the education of women, as being intrusive to people's private lives and anti-Islamic (Zulfacar, 2006). As conflict continued to escalate, many Afghans from rural areas began to move to the cities

or to leave the country. The deterioration of the PDP's position in the country as well as its increasing levels of alliance with the US began to alarm the USSR and in December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan (Lyon, 2006).

The presence of Soviet forces, rather than assuaging the high levels of conflict in the country, led to the rise of a resistance movement by freedom fighting groups called the Mujahideen, or "holy warriors." The United States Central Intelligence Agency, seeing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a threat to their own interests in the Middle East, provided support to these Mujahideen groups, especially the more extremist ones, in the form of arms and military training (Gregory, 2004). This support continued until the Soviet regime ended in 1989 when it was ousted by an alliance of Mujahideen groups.

The Mujahideen alliance, however, was short-lived and the ensuing power struggles between various groups over the next seven years from 1989 to 1996 led to widespread violence and civil strife, and women were caught in this web of violence. The arms that the US had supplied for resistance against the Soviet regime were now used by the Mujahideen groups in inter-group conflict. The violence was particularly intense in and around Kabul, destroying the city's infrastructure and leaving much of it in ruins. Indiscriminate bombing, arrests, torture, rape and executions were widespread and much of this was targeted at women. Rights gained by women in the Soviet era were now rescinded, leaving women with little access to education and employment.

However, the situation grew even more dismal during the equally if not more repressive regime of the Taliban. The Taliban were a loose network of Muslim fighters from madrassas (religious schools) that had been set up in refugee camps in Pakistan. The

men in these groups had become disillusioned with the Mujahideen and envisioned that a 'pure' Islam would be the answer to Afghanistan's problems. This version of Islam was based on a literal reading of the Qur'an, with no room for interpretation or contextualization. During the early 1990s, these groups became increasingly more organized, and by 1996 they succeeded in moving into and taking over Kabul until they were eventually ousted by the US bombing of Afghanistan in 2002 (Gregory, 2004). Hamid Karzai took over as an interim leader, and was eventually elected as president of Afghanistan in 2004.

Afghanistan has experienced many years of internal turmoil and foreign intervention and its colonial past manifests itself in the colonial present (Gregory, 2004). Within this historical context, the rights and conditions for the women of Afghanistan have moved back and forth between periods of relative stability and social reform to periods of extreme violence and repression. These swings have had a profound impact on the everyday lives of women - raising hopes and expectations in some periods, followed by times of intense fear, disappointment and disillusionment. An exploration of the renegotiation of identity of immigrant Afghan women requires as a starting point an understanding of how these historical events impacted the context in which women left Afghanistan and thus their experiences of migration to a new country.

Post-migration context of Canada

Refugees and involuntary immigrants arrive in Canada with hopes for a better future for themselves and for their families. Often, their migration has been preceded by experiences of violence and unrest, loss of homes and family members and disrupted education and work lives. Many refugees have also spent months or even years in refugee

camps where normal lives were suspended for a period of time. When they arrive in Canada, they come with the hope of improving their material well-being and of living in a peaceful and safe environment. The experiences of migration and settlement, however, can be fraught with challenges, especially for refugees who may be suffering from high degrees of stress and trauma when they arrive in Canada.

The first priority for women is to acquire language skills since these are crucial in gaining access to resources and to educational and economic opportunities (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Language competence makes it easier to negotiate everyday tasks and can help to alleviate the isolation and loneliness that many new immigrants face. Participation in the political system also requires language competency since a working knowledge of English or French is a pre-requisite to gaining citizenship in Canada. Language proficiency after migration depends on a number of factors. These include personal and demographic characteristics, pre-migration achievement levels, the time and resource investment in language training after migration and the opportunities and benefits available in the new society (Hou & Beiser). The acquisition of language skills can be hindered by a lack of accessibility to training programs, uneven access to affordable childcare, transportation challenges and gendered family roles that place the responsibility of caring for children on women (Beiser & Hou, 2000). ESL programs for new immigrants are often very broad and rarely provide the language skills required for specific professions and trades. In addition, in a study designed to explore issues facing African immigrant women in Vancouver, Creese and Kambere (2003) found that a strong non-Canadian accent serves as a boundary that constrains the process of settlement and more specifically, participation in the labour market.

Immigrant women arrive in Canada with varying levels of literacy, educational and professional qualifications. However, high levels of educational and professional achievement in their home countries do not necessarily translate into concomitant employment opportunities in Canada. In a review of the literature which focuses on integration outcomes for immigrant women, VanderPlaat (2007) provides some telling labour force participation and earning statistics. In their first six months in Canada, newly arrived women immigrants are less likely to find work than male immigrants. When they do find work, it is more likely to be in the sales and service sectors rather than in the professions. When surveyed about job satisfaction, 36% of immigrant women indicated that they would like to find a different job from the one in which they were currently employed, indicating a high level of job dissatisfaction and underemployment. In terms of income, recent immigrant women earn 20% less than all immigrant and non-immigrant women. They also earn 45% less than Canadian born women of a similar age and educational achievement, and it takes ten years for these differences to disappear.

There are a number of factors that contribute to these poor economic outcomes for women, and Man (2004), Mojab (1999) and Tastsglou & Preston (2005) outline some of these factors. Although more immigrant women who migrated to Canada between 1996 and 2001 have undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees compared to Canadian born and earlier immigrants, these credentials do not provide them with an advantage. Educational and professional credentials from the country of origin are often not recognized and the situation is worsened when women who have had to flee from their countries have little or no documentation to demonstrate their qualifications. The financial costs for retraining, especially at the post-secondary level are prohibitive for

many newcomers, and in some fields such as medicine, the chances of recertification are extremely slim. New immigrants are often caught in the bind of demonstrating "Canadian experience" without the opportunities to gain this experience. As a result, women are more likely to take and stay in low paying jobs. Structural factors such as globalization, economic restructuring and racialized discriminatory practices also have an impact on women's participation in the labour force and their ability to navigate and participate in work and learning opportunities.

The experiences of immigrant women who arrive in Canada with their families must be examined in the context of the family unit because of the importance of "caregiving or kin work" in the women's lives (Vanderplaat, 2007). This perspective is more useful in providing a gendered view of women's settlement experiences and can be used to analyze individual settlement and integration outcomes within the context of family outcomes. Women are often expected to respond to multiple responsibilities of education, work, child care and housework as well as the initial tasks of settlement including finding appropriate health care and housing. Trying to balance the needs of the family with their need to access education and employment imposes additional barriers. To participate in educational programs, women with children require child care and transportation, and often the time commitment required to attend educational programs can impose insurmountable barriers. Women may stay in precarious or unsuitable work situations because of a variety of factors including financial obligations to extended family either in Canada or elsewhere, or being the sole support for the family either as a single parent or while a spouse attends school or looks for work (Vanderplaat, 2007).

Although research on the impact of migration tends to focus on economic impact, immigration and settlement also have a considerable social and cultural impact on individuals and families. Waters and Teo (2003), in a review and analysis of the research in this area, categorize these social and cultural impacts into four areas: the impact of migration on kinship and friendship networks, changes to family roles, generational conflicts and issues of identity, and lastly, challenges and new opportunities for immigrant women.

New immigrants have to sort through a large amount of information when they first arrive in Canada and this challenge is exacerbated by unfamiliarity with language (Creese, Dyck & McLaren, 1999). Kinship and family networks, when available, can help with this task and provide assistance in finding a home, accessing health services, obtaining information on educational opportunities and providing leads to employment. An absence of these networks can lead to a sense of loneliness and isolation and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the multiple tasks of settlement.

The new demands of settlement may also affect gender and other roles within the family. Creese, Dyck and McLaren (1999) suggest that "immigration unsettles family relations in multiple ways and may give rise to new forms of independence, dependence and identities" (p. 7). Families that are organized around the model of male authority may find that this model cannot be sustained because of changing roles within the family. Traditional roles of men as financial breadwinners and women as caregivers and homemakers may not be as clearly demarcated as they may have been in the past (Waters & Teo, 2003). For example, women may have to contribute to the family income to a greater degree than they did in their home countries because of low-levels of family

income during the settlement period. Men may have to spend more time on child care and domestic duties than they were used to because of shift work or a lack of options for child care. There may be tension around negotiating family concerns with individual needs and desires, requiring different ways of making decisions and resolving conflict within the family unit. The forms of dependence that existed in the home country may now be reversed, with elders depending on the younger members of the family to help them navigate the unfamiliar pathways of settlement (Creese et al., 1999).

Generational conflict may add to these issues. In the process of settlement, families inevitably encounter a set of values, beliefs and everyday norms that are different from their own. Younger members of the family may be drawn to adopt some of these values, whereas older members of the family may resist change by trying to reinforce existing values (Waters & Teo, 2003). Since family and community networks are a key source of support during the settlement period, it becomes important to resolve some of these tensions to maintain a sense of cohesiveness within these networks. The need to attend to and negotiate these tensions adds to the already stressful tasks of settlement.

Although women face many challenges in the process of migration, their arrival in Canada also provides them with opportunities for education and employment that may not have been available in their home countries. This lack of access may have been due to prescribed gender roles such as the expectations of being married and having children by a certain age, or of not working outside the home. For refugee women fleeing from turmoil and war, the situation in their home country may have prevented many women

from pursuing their educational and career goals and life in Canada may open up new educational, work and career pathways.

Renegotiating Identity

Postcolonial theory has provided a fertile ground for the emergence of theories of identity that are relevant to migrants who have moved to new regions and countries as part of the increasingly global flow of populations. Diasporas, "a central historical fact of colonization" (Ashcroft, Grifiths and Tiffin, 1998, p. 68-69) are created by "the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions" (p. 68). Brah (1996) suggests that the concept of the diaspora is useful as "an interpretive frame for analyzing the economic, political, and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy" (p. 16), and can be drawn upon to explore ideas of subjectivity and identity. Discussions in postcolonial theory that are relevant to migrant experiences suggest new ways of understanding and envisioning identity that move away from previous conceptions of identity based on essentialist categories of ethnicity, race or nationalism and towards a more fluid and dynamic view (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b). The encounter between pre and post-migration identities creates a tension that necessitates as well as facilitates the creation of composite or hybrid identities, aspects of which are drawn from many different identity categories. Theorists have suggested that the creation of hybrid identities has the potential to open up in-between or liminal spaces of resistance and subversion as well as creativity and newness (Anzaldua, 1999; Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Lugones, 2003). Postcolonial theory takes up ideas of diaspora, identity and the enactment of hybrid identities within liminal spaces to

conceptualize and provide a framework for understanding how migrants renegotiate their identities and re-imagine themselves in their new landscapes.

Migration and Diasporas

The settlement of migrants in new regions away from their places of origin has given rise to disaporas in many parts of the world. The word diaspora comes from the Greek word meaning 'to scatter,' evoking notions of movements and journeys (Brah, 1996). The journeys that bring migrants to a new land are not necessarily single journeys, but possibly a series of journeys spread out over time and through several regions before ending at a particular destination. One of the defining characteristics of a diaspora is a community that "maintains a memory, vision or myth of the homeland" (Safran, as cited in Clifford, 1994). Clifford suggests that "diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension" (1994, p. 312). Migrants often mourn the loss of their identities as they look to their past and to their "imaginary homelands" (Rushdie, 1991) with a sense of nostalgia. This looking backward may be a way of seeking a coherent sense of the self, a self that is unified and stable, and embedded within symbols of ethnic, cultural, national or other communities. But identities based on static notions of home and belonging are at odds with the diasporic identities that are continually shaped and shifted through differences encountered in new cultural milieus. Migrants must learn to negotiate between the old and the new. Hall (1996b) describes this as a process of translation:

> This [translation] describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been *dispersed* forever from their homeland....They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their

> identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages, and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several "homes" (and to no one particular "home"). (p. 629)

The diaspora, then, is not necessarily a community composed of an original, homogenous or fixed identity but is characterized by plurality, fluidity and change. The migrant's journey across both physical and symbolic boundaries gives rise to diaspora identities that are always in flux, and "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 1990, p. 235). The discussion of diaspora in this context avoids essentializing identities based on ethnicity or culture and focuses instead on constructing the diaspora as a space for the renegotiation of multiple identities in the context of the migrant's new home. Postcolonial theories of identity provide further insight into how these identities may be negotiated, positioned and enacted.

Postcolonial Theories of Identity

A common thread that runs through discussions of postcolonial identities, especially since the 1990s, is the emphasis on identities that, as a result of colonization and migration, are plural, differentiated, hybrid, and constructed through processes of historicization and social relations (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). To understand the shift that this conception of identity presents, it is useful to look at the theories of identity that preceded it. Hall (1996b) provides a brief summary of three conceptions of identity: the

Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the post-modern subject. The Enlightenment subject viewed the individual as centered and unified, as having an essential core which stays largely unchanged through the life course. This essential core has certain characteristics and gives rise to a social group that shares these characteristics. This individualist view in which the subject is rational and autonomous was replaced by the view of the individual as being a sociological subject, constructed in relation to others and through the culture and context of everyday life. The subject still has an essential core but this core is mediated through society. Recently, the changing and increasingly diverse nature of societies has highlighted the shifting and fragmented nature of identities. As Mercer (1990) reminds us, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (p. 43). This sense of doubt and uncertainty that characterizes current times has led to conceptions of the post-modern subject which has no fixed or essential identity. A stable and coherent identity may be part of a narrative we hold on to for a sense of security, but from a post-modern view, identity is conceptualized as being in constant flux - "a constructed process rather than a given essence" (Loomba, 2005, p. 148).

In deconstructing the theoretical concept of identity, Hall suggests that it should be replaced by a new concept, one in which the idea of a unitary subject has been decentred rather than abandoned (Hall, 1996a). Although the 'old' theoretical concept of identity has not been fully replaced by a 'new' one, Hall suggests several features of this new concept. To start with, identities are not seen as unified and singular but as multiple and fragmented. They are socially constructed and relational, and undergo constant

transformation dependent on specific histories, contexts and locations. Identities are always constructed through difference, based on the distinction of what is included and excluded from each identity position. Additionally, identities are always constructed and enunciated within discourse, "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (Hall, 1996a, p. 4). These identifications are not permanent and stable, but are temporary attachments to subject positions that are constructed through discourse. Identities, therefore, can be viewed as sutures, or meeting points that "chain" the "subject into the flow of the discourse" (p. 6). Subject positions or subjectivities are never static but always precarious, changing and often contradictory, and are a product of the social and cultural milieu within which they are produced (Weedon, 1997). Although migrants often look back to their pre-migration identities with nostalgia, Hall (1990, 1996a) suggests that identity is not something that is fixed in time and place to which one can return but is always in a process of becoming rather than being. Although "the past continues to speak to us" (Hall 1990, p. 395), our identities are "about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become" (Hall, 1996a, p. 4). The renegotiation of identity does not necessitate going back to an essential self by returning to our roots, but is more about considering the routes through which identities shift and change in new contexts and milieus.

Hybridity and Liminal Spaces

The notions of hybrid identities in postcolonial literature and theory have been influential in providing new and emergent conceptions of colonized identities, and these conceptions have been used to understand and gain insight into migrant and marginalized

identities (McLeod, 2000). Although the definition of the word hybridity implies the mixing of two different and separate things, postcolonial ideas of hybridity challenge and extend this binary notion. Homi K. Bhabha (1994), who has been influential in defining and articulating the ideas of hybrid identities, suggests that hybridity is an integral element of the colonial condition that arises from resistance to the colonizer/colonized relationship. Neither colonizer nor colonized identities are fixed – both are in flux and unstable, and contradict any claims of a coherent self. The categories of the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized' are riddled with many differences within these categories, resulting in the impossibility of perpetually fixing this relationship into a binary one. Although binary oppositions of identity are seen as being crucial in the formation of the colonial self and of the 'Other,' the colonizer has in fact failed to fix the other "into perpetual otherness" (Loomba, 2005, p. 145). Colonial authority cannot be perfectly reproduced because "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 153). Hybridity, then, naturally arises when the colonizer attempts to construct the identity of the colonized within some universal or essential framework, but fails. In these moments of resistance to colonial dominance, the cultures of colonizer and the colonized come together to make space for the emergence of hybrid identities.

Paul Gilroy provides an example of hybridity in the description of black diasporas in various parts of the world created first by the movement of black slaves from Africa to America and the Caribbean, and later of various black communities to Britain and the Americas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (McLeod, 2000). These movements gave rise to African diasporas, not formed on the basis of essential black subjects or a

universal black experience but created from the crossing over of many different cultures. Gilroy uses the image of a ship as a metaphor for the movement of ideas and cultural practices across various African diasporas. In the nineteenth century, ships were used to transport black people to and from various locations across the Atlantic, but they also served as a means of spreading new ideas and cultural practices. This kind of movement produces new and hybrid identities which are rooted, not in any particular time or place, but fashioned as people travel through the various routes of migration. These identities form the basis of contingent transnational communities. Although black diasporas are "discontinuous, historically contingent, locally variable, and internally heterodox" (McLeod, p. 231), they provide new spaces within which to defy binary and essential forms of identity, as well as to create a solidarity to resist colonial discourse and to forge local acts of resistance.

Homi Bhabha draws on psychoanalytic and poststructural theories to conceptualize the production of hybrid identities. The process of hybridization produces multiple subjectivities that are renegotiated in what Bhabha (1994) describes as a liminal or third space, one of flux and transition and on the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation" (p. 56). He uses the metaphor of a stairwell to aptly depict this 'third space':

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue....The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural

> hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (p. 5)

The liminal space allows the individual to negotiate between two polarities, without having to settle into either end, and provides an opening for resistance to colonial authority. The colonizer may attempt to impose binary discourses of self/other but the hybrid within the liminal space has the potential to resist the authoritarian inscription of culture through a negotiation which is "neither assimilation nor collaboration" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58). This negotiation involves translating previously held ideas and principles, rethinking and extending them (Bhabha, 1990) so that identities can be imagined, constructed and renegotiated. The work of identity renegotiation adds another layer of complexity to the experiences of the new migrant, but also opens up spaces for multiple perspectives and plural views of the world. The spaces in which identities are renegotiated can be full of ambivalence and contradictions, but they can also be generative and empowering, making the liminal space a "terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (p. 2).

Similar and complementary to Bhabha's conception of hybridity is Anzaldua's notion of the mestiza identity, explicated in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999). Anzaldua's work arises from her description of the borderland between Mexico and the U.S. as being both a geographic one as well as a cultural, psychological, spiritual and sexual border. This border is not unique but occurs whenever two cultures, or two frames of reference, meet or collide. Although the border is a difficult territory to inhabit because it necessities the negotiation of shifting and multiple identities, it can also give rise to a new consciousness:

> That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness–a *mestiza* consciousness. (p. 79-80)

Similar to Bhabha's depiction of the creation of hybrid identities within a liminal or third space, Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness arises from the borderlands, a space of multiplicity, plurality and flexibility. The mestiza is a hybrid, constructed from the many categories of gender, class, sexuality, race and ethnicity, and the multiple positions within these categories. Ambivalence and a tolerance for ambiguity characterize the mestiza, and these elements are crucial in the task of collapsing dualistic modes of thinking to move towards "new images of identity [and] new beliefs about ourselves" (p. 87).

Identity, Learning and Pedagogy

Multiple Identities and Learning

The notion of identity as being multiple, hybrid, socially constructed and relational leads to the question of how learning can be (re)envisioned within this conceptualization. A hybrid identity implies multiple subjectivities, and hence multiple ways that we position the self in varying contexts. How then, is an identity that is nonunitary, hybrid, constantly shifting and always in flux implicated in a learning situation?

The field of adult education has in recent years been impacted by rapid changes in social, cultural and economic conditions, the increased diversity of adult learners and a move from a focus on adult education to a broader view of adult learning (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). These changes have necessitated a rethinking of the modernist discourse which has been the basis of much of the theory and practice in the field of adult education, and a move towards a postmodern stance. In contrast to the "unified, coherent and sovereign self of modernity, the firm ground for the fixing of identity" (p. 10), the postmodernist conceptualization of the self is one of multiple shifting identities, constantly experiencing discontinuity and fragmentation. Importantly, this self is not considered unnatural or requiring fixing through education, therapy and counselling but as one that is open to constructively discarding and adopting new identities through experiences in different contexts. The role of education in the postmodern, rather than being the transmission and validation of grand narratives and the pursuit of pre-defined goals, becomes focused on valuing difference, highlighting specific and localized knowledges and acknowledging the role of multiple subjectivities in the learning experience.

The process of identity formation and reformation can be envisaged as a kind of learning that occurs throughout our lives (Flannery, 2002). The renegotiation of identities that is part of the migration process is implicated in the process of learning in two ways. First, identity renegotiation involves learning how to use the in-between and potentially creative spaces of migration as opportunities for (re)constructing new identities and subjectivities. Second, since the learning process is inextricably linked to the social contexts in which learning occurs (Hayes, 2002), the way in which individuals engage

with and participate in both formal and informal learning will undoubtedly be affected by their migration experiences, in which identity renegotiation plays an integral role.

A gendered view of learning can be useful in shedding light on the learning process of immigrant women. The literature on women and learning and on feminist pedagogy has been informed by theoretical frameworks which can be categorized into three broad areas – psychological, structural and poststructural feminist frameworks (Flannery & Hayes, 2002). Psychological frameworks focus on the individual but pay insufficient attention to the impact of structures. Structural frameworks do not take into account the multiple oppressions imposed on women. Frameworks based on postmodern and poststructural feminist theories provide a basis for considering how learning can be re-envisioned. These frameworks foreground issues of gender, but they also consider intersecting forms of oppressions that mediate gender and create constantly shifting and sometimes contradictory identities (Tisdell, 1998). Considering learners' identities as being multiple and shifting has implications for pedagogy and can help create an awareness of issues of authority, positionality and the processes of knowledge construction within the learning environment (Tisdell, 1998). These issues can be used as a starting point to explore the relationship between identity renegotiation and women's engagement in formal and informal learning.

Chicano Feminist Pedagogies

Chicano feminist pedagogical frameworks bring together a feminist poststructural focus and the conception of a mestiza consciousness or border identity drawn from the multiple subjectivities of Chicana/Latino women. These frameworks focus on the renegotiation of multiple identities and on issues of knowledge construction and power in

pedagogical situations (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Elenes, 1997; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal & Villenas, 2001; Galvàn, 2001). Within these frameworks, the work of identity construction and renegotiation is intertwined with and enmeshed within the individual and collective production of knowledge and the process of teaching and learning.

The conceptualization of a Chicano pedagogy and epistemology is based on lessons learned not only from formal educational settings, but within the pedagogical moments present in homes and communities and based on ways of knowing that are "rooted in Chicana/Latina theories and visions of life, family, community and the world" (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2006, p. 2). The inclusion of home and community based pedagogies can contribute to a broader understanding of how "the everyday, the mundane, and the ordinary" can be sites for teaching and learning (Galvàn, 2001, p. 619). These pedagogical moments are embedded within the political practices of teaching and learning that are "intended to enhance personal and social possibilities while also interrogating social practices and forms of hierarchies and power within a political and economic context" (Elenes et al., 2001, p. 595). Understanding the ways in which local and situated knowledge within these moments is individually and collectively constructed forms the basis of a teaching and learning pedagogy that can be individually empowering. On a broader scale, this understanding can contribute to a political practice that interrupts and resists injustice and oppressions and works towards achieving social and political change and transformation. Chicano feminist pedagogical frameworks can be used to expand our "knowledge of immigrant peoples' values and experiences, as well as the way they live, learn, and teach each other every day" (Galvan, 2001, p. 618).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a literature review encompassing three areas. The first area provided an overview of the historical and political events that surrounded both the migration and the settlement of Afghan women in their journey from Afghanistan to Canada. The second area focused on theories of identity to frame the process of women's identity renegotiation during the migration process. Although postcolonial theories of identity, hybridity and liminality have been used to explore the experiences of migrants in diasporas, there is a paucity of literature that extends these theories into the areas of immigrant learning and pedagogy. The third area brought together issues of identity, learning and pedagogy. Work in the area of black feminist thought and education, and more recently, theories of Chicana feminist pedagogy provide some useful insights, but do not directly address the issues of Canadian immigrant women and learning within a postcolonial framework. I hope that the results of this study will contribute to the efforts being made to address this gap and provide a perspective on how postcolonial theories of identity can shed light on issues of identity, learning and pedagogy for immigrant women in Canada.

CHAPTER 3:

THE RESEARCH STUDY - FRAMEWORKS AND METHODS

I begin this chapter by outlining the central question of the research study. Next, I outline the methodological frameworks of the study. In the third section, I describe the methods used to recruit participants, collect, analyze and present the data. Lastly, I discuss the ethical issues I considered, including my insider/outsider position as the researcher.

Research Questions

The central question of this study is: What is the relationship between the migration experiences of Afghan refugee women in Canada and their process of identity renegotiation? Within this central question are embedded four broad areas of investigation:

- What were the women's pre-migration and post-migration experiences?
- How do women renegotiate their sense of identity in Canada?
- What are the constraints and enablers of the renegotiation of their identity?
- What is the relationship between the process of renegotiation of identity and the formal and informal learning processes women engage in?

Methodological Frameworks

Introduction

In this research project, in order to explore the migration and learning experiences of Afghan women, I used a qualitative research methodology based in the interpretive tradition of phenomenology and hermeneutics and the related method of narrative inquiry. Phenomenological research focuses on the study of lived experiences to gain a deeper appreciation of these experiences. Deriving the meaning that is ascribed to experiences requires a hermeneutics or interpretation of these experiences. Narrative inquiry is both a research approach and method that can be used to elicit stories of a particular event or series of events of importance, such as migration, as well as the meaning that is ascribed to these events. Furthermore, a feminist standpoint approach to research provides a way of "locating knowledge or inquiry in women's standpoint or in women's experience" (Smith, 1987, as cited in Naples, 2003, p. 14). The use of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, a feminist standpoint approach and the method of narrative inquiry fit well with the central question of my research, which was to understand the relationship between the migration experiences of Afghan immigrant women in Canada and their process of identity renegotiation.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The tradition of phenomenology incorporates many different approaches but what is common to these approaches is a focus on gaining an understanding of the nature of lived experiences and the individual and shared meaning of these experiences (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology does not attempt to understand these meanings as specific to

certain cultural or social groups or to a historical period but in relation to our everyday existence or our lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). Our everyday experiences are made up of minute details and a phenomenological approach "encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions" (van Manen, p. 8) of our lives. A phenomenological approach can be used to derive the common elements in these experiences and to add them to the body of existing knowledge about experiences in a similar context. It is not the goal of phenomenological methodology to develop a theory which is based on categorizing and classifying experiences and which will explicate all instances of an experience, but rather to develop "plausible insights" (van Manen, p. 9) which will allow us to engage in the world in a more direct way.

A hermeneutic approach is based on the assumption that capturing lived experiences is an interpretive process that depends on the cultural context of both the experience and the interpretation (Patton, 2002). Although the phenomenological approach focuses on a description of lived experiences and hermeneutics on the interpretation of these experiences, it is difficult to entirely separate the two since the act of description can never be completely independent of some level of interpretation. Van Manen (1990) suggests that it is possible to make some distinction between the two, and uses Gadamer's explanation of two kinds of interpretation. The first kind of interpretation is a "*pointing to* something," and the second kind is "*pointing out* the meaning of something" (p. 26). A phenomenological approach generally points to and focuses on the experience itself whereas a hermeneutic approach focuses on pointing out the interpretation and meaning of the experience. These two approaches provide a useful framework for exploring the migration experiences of Afghan immigrant women and for

investigating the connection between the meaning of these experiences and the women's process of identity renegotiation.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies

Feminist standpoint epistemologies provide a framework for centering the lived realities of women's experiences, highlighting their construction of knowledge and foregrounding this knowledge based on their marginal positions in oppressive structures (Naples, 2003). Standpoint epistemologies are based on the viewpoint that the experiences of marginalized groups can provide a more complete and less distorted view of reality. The knowledge of these groups should have epistemic privilege over the knowledge of dominant groups, based on the marginalized groups' ability to see issues and perspectives that are ignored by dominant groups. Feminist researchers emphasize that the everyday lives and experiences of women are often invisible. As a method of inquiry, feminist standpoint epistemology responds to this issue by foregrounding the experiences of women and their construction of knowledge and by examining these through women's own standpoints or positions. This standpoint does not have to be a uniform one that essentializes women's experiences but one that locates them within a specific context. The knowledge acquired through this standpoint can be used to achieve a kind of "epistemic resource" that provides "critical insights about nature and the larger social order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge" (Harding, 2004, p. 9). Through this study, I hope to explore the specific experiences of a group of women who migrated from Afghanistan to Canada and to situate these experiences within a social and historical context in order to highlight issues of social concern.

Narrative Inquiry

The method of narrative inquiry falls within the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and provides qualitative researchers with a means of reflecting on the narrator's experiences and perceptions of these experiences within the social, historical and cultural patterns that have shaped them (Naples, 2003). The narrative, which is the empirical material that the researcher collects, can be a story about a particular event in the narrator's life, an extended story about a significant event such as an experience of trauma, or a complete life history (Chase, 2005). The telling of a narrative reveals more than the events encompassed in the narrative – it also reveals how the narrator makes meaning of past experiences and provides insights into her point of view, including why she thinks her story is important. A narrative method seeks to answer the question: What does this narrative tell us about the person, and how can we interpret the narrative to understand the history and culture of the narrator (Patton, 2002)?

Narrative inquiry can also be used to think about "the continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17) and is the best way both to explore the meaning of the experience and to represent it. In this sense, the narrative can be viewed as both phenomenon and method. The narrative is the phenomenon under study as well as the method of inquiry. The task of narrative inquiry is to explore people's life experiences by listening to and collecting their stories, by developing interpretations of the stories, and by writing and presenting the stories. In this way, researchers themselves become narrators, inevitably weaving their own voices, experiences and contexts into the stories they tell (Chase, 2005).

The process of narrative inquiry is a collaborative space between the researcher and the participant and focuses on four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inward direction of inquiry focuses on the emotions and thoughts of the narrator and the outward direction of inquiry is the context in which the story is enacted. The backward and forward directions of inquiry investigate the temporal dimensions of the story which incorporate the past, the present and the future. Clark (2001) suggests that the methodology of narrative inquiry is particularly useful when examining issues of subjectivity and identity, since "it is through narrative that the complex self is made visible" (p. 15).

Although narrative inquiry can be invaluable in studying individual experiences, Atkinson (1997) cautions against seeing the narrative as a way of revealing the authentic self of the narrator. The notions of the authentic self are "romantic constructions" which do not take into account the ways in which the self is discursively produced and subject to social action. A focus on the personal and private life of the individual without sufficient attention to social context can create "a surrogate form of liberal humanism and a romantic celebration of the individual subject" (Atkinson, p. 335). However, a critical use of the narrative form can help the researcher guard against the danger of attempting to discover the true authentic self or of seeing the self as a rational autonomous agent. Narrative inquiry can be used to reveal the complex ways in which individuals construct their selves and the ways in which these selves are socially, culturally and discursively shaped in a specific temporal context. The narrator's story can be thought of, not as one story, but as multiple stories that emanate from the narrator's multiple subject positions. Gubrium and Holstein (2002) suggest that by "treating subject positions and their

associated voices seriously, we might find that an ostensibly single interview could actually be, in practice, an interview with several subjects, whose particular identities may be only partially clear" (p. 23). Each of these multiple stories can be seen as one expression of the relationship between the construction of the self and the factors that shape this construction. The researcher can guard against the tendency to search out the authentic voice of the narrator by paying attention to the various positions from which the narrator speaks and by attending to the complexities and tensions embedded within each story. This critical use of narrative inquiry is particularly relevant to my investigation of the ways in which immigrant women renegotiate their identities through the process of migration. My goal as a researcher was not to try and discover the participants' authentic sense of self or identity, but to understand women's experiences through their multiple roles and subject positions, and a critical use of the narrative form lends itself to this inquiry.

Methods of Data Collection

Selecting the Participants

One of the characteristics of narrative inquiry is to move away from the focus on generalizability. Generalizability requires collecting a sufficient quantity of data to allow researchers to create theories that are applicable across a wide range of contexts and circumstances. Narrative inquirers however, focus on the local to reflect on the complexity of experience located in a particular space, time and context (Chase, 2005, Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Therefore, a small number of narratives can be used to study the specific experiences of participants and the meaning of these experiences, and to use

this data for a deeper examination of the stories and their contexts. Seidman (2006) supports this view when he states that "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 55).

For this study, I recruited four participants from a group of women who had participated in a mentoring program for women from Afghanistan who had recently arrived in Canada. The women were in their late twenties and early thirties and had arrived in Canada in the last six to eight years. They came from fairly similar social and economic backgrounds and also shared a common ethnic origin and religious faith. I initially contacted the women by phone to explain the purpose and nature of my research and the time commitment that would be required. Four of the five women I contacted agreed to participate, and I set up the date for the first interview with each of them.

Listening to Participants' Stories

One way in which narrative researchers can attend to their participants' stories is through unstructured interviews which provide the empirical material that the researcher can use to understand the narrator's experiences and to interpret and make meaning of them. The process of narrative inquiry requires the researcher to invite participants to tell their stories rather than to seek answers to specific questions. Harding (2006) states that in the narrative approach to interviewing, "emphasis is on how the individual looks back on his/her life and how s/he chooses to put this into words, what s/he emphasizes and what s/he leaves out" (¶ 3.7). Conventional, or more structured interviews which are designed to elicit responses to specific questions, often see participants as passive

subjects who are vessels of answers for the questions posed to them (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). In that model of interviewing, the researcher must ask specific questions to elicit responses which will fit the researcher's sense of what is important to know. The method of narrative inquiry, however, requires the researcher to invite participants to choose the stories they will tell, and this can be achieved by starting with broad questions and themes rather than specific questions. Chase (2005) refers to the narrative interview as a sort of paradox. On one hand the researcher invites the narrator to choose the story she will tell, but on the other hand, the researcher has a certain purpose and direction in mind. The task of the researcher is to stay with the purpose of the research but to be open to putting aside assumptions about which stories are important to the narrator.

For the purpose of understanding autobiographical accounts of individual experience, Harding (2006) recommends a non-chronological approach to interviewing, and one that considers the contexts in which lives have been lived and narratives are told:

> A strictly chronological approach tends to assume that life cycle and stages (childhood, schooling, work etc) are universal, and does not properly acknowledge the impact on these of history, politics and culture. …these categories take on precise meanings in specific political, social and economic contexts, especially when these entail upheaval and displacement. …The cumulative nature of experience may be more evident to the interviewer if related as a sequence of chronological events, but this approach risks losing the depth and complexity of how experience accumulates through interaction with the past in the present, and is reworked, unevenly and with different intensities (¶. 3.3).

In this study, I conducted between two and four individual interviews with each woman over a five month period, for a total of ten interviews with the four participants. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The lengths of the interviews ranged from forty five minutes to an hour and half, and were conducted in a variety of locations. One of the interviews took place in the participant's home, four in my home, one in a coffee shop and the rest at a community college that two of the participants were attending.

Rather than have specific questions for the participants, I used an interview guide (see Appendix D) which served as a reminder of the overall purpose of my research. I began the interviewing process by employing Seidman's three-interview structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing (2006). In this structure, the goal of the first interview is to establish a context for understanding the participant's past experiences (life in Afghanistan and pre-migration experiences). The second interview focuses on the experiences related to the question (migration experiences). In the third interview, the researcher encourages participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them and to explore the factors in their lives that came together to bring them to their current situation, with the assumption that exploring the past establishes conditions for reflecting on the present. However, as the interviews progressed, I found that each participant chose to tell her story in a different way. Some women naturally fell into the three-interview structure by starting off with a chronological narrative and following up with how their current lives had been affected by past experiences. Other participants went back and forth between events and the meanings these events held for them. In the end, in keeping with the narrative inquiry framework, I left it up to each woman to tell

her stories in a way that made sense to her, in the hope that the choice of stories and the way they were told would in itself contribute to providing the answers to my research questions about what aspects of identity were most important to each woman, and how these aspects were renegotiated through the process of migration.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I sent the transcripts to the participants to make any changes they wished to. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to data collected in the field as "field texts." These can include oral histories, photographs and artefacts, journals, letters, or transcripts of conversations and interviews. In this study, the field texts include the transcripts of the interviews with the participants as well as my notes. These are notes of my reflections, thoughts and ideas about both the process and the content of the interviews that I jotted down during and after the interviews.

Interpreting Stories and Making Meaning

The process of interpreting data collected in the field is one of finding meaning in the field texts and moving from these texts to the construction of research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Research texts are used to present the results of the investigation and can take the form of dissertations, books, papers or presentations. One method of moving from field texts to research texts is the production of interim texts. The creation of these texts can be merely part of the process of inquiry or can be included in the final research texts. This process of interpretation begins with reading and re-reading the field texts and asking questions about the meaning and significance of narrative events. A narrative inquirer looks for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within or across and individual's experience and in the social setting" (p. 132). The process of moving from field texts to research texts is not a linear one, but one that the

researcher keeps reiterating to reveal the complexity and layers within the narratives told. These re-readings occur in the context of the researcher's own lived experiences as well as previous research and theory relevant to the question being asked. As a framework for my analysis, I used postcolonial theories of diaspora, identity and hybridity as well as theories that make the connection between fluid identities and learning. These theories were outlined in the literature review in the previous chapter.

I began the process of interpretation and analysis after completing the first few interviews and continued until I had conducted ten interviews with the four participants. The analysis of the transcripts – the field texts - was facilitated through the use of a qualitative data management software package, Atlas.ti©. This software includes tools and functions which I used to annotate the transcripts, add notes and memos, and track and organize the themes and patterns that emerged from my initial readings. The annotated and highlighted transcripts were one form of an interim text since they included the results of an initial level of analysis and interpretation.

My next step in the analysis phase was to write a short narrative of each woman's story in order to help me refine the initial themes and patterns. These narratives could also be considered an interim text. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommend that, in the writing of a narrative, we work at temporarily "stilling our theoretical voices" (p. 12). In the process of creating my version of the women's narratives, I tried to set aside emerging themes and to focus instead on capturing and telling the women's narratives in a way that would honour their complex and layered stories and experiences. I did this by paying close attention to the stories each woman had chosen to tell, and the way she chose to tell them. The process of writing the narratives in fact helped me to identify the

emerging themes, supporting Richardson's (2000) assertion that "writing is also a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 923). I saw the themes that I derived from the narratives as the threads that were woven into the women's stories and my task now was to disentangle the narrative threads that were most salient to my research question.

Presenting the Stories

The process of interpreting stories and making meaning can be complex and fraught with tensions. One of the tensions I experienced and that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have aptly described is the need to represent individual stories in their richness with the seemingly contradictory need to create generalizable themes and patterns that are applicable across the stories. Frank (2000) also talks about this tension and warns against the risk of moving too quickly from the story to the analysis of the story, resulting in a shift of focus from the storyteller's concerns to the researcher's questions. He suggests that "analysis has its legitimate sphere, but there is also a clear imperative for the analyst to step back from first-person testimony and allow those who testify to speak for themselves" (p. 361). This is what I tried to do in writing the short narratives. However, the researcher's task is also to stay alert to the ways in which individual stories can contribute to modifying, extending or creating theory.

Bochner (1997) suggests that the split between theory and story is ostensibly a false one, and that stories can be put to good use in the process of theorizing. Rather than view stories as merely data to be used to test and build theory, he suggests that we "stay with the story, letting ourselves resonate with the moral dilemmas it may pose, understanding its ambiguities, examining its contradictions, feeling its nuances, letting

ourselves become part of the story" (Ellis, as cited in Bochner, 1997, p. 436). My approach to resolving the apparent tension between presenting told stories on their own and using analytical themes to represent the stories was to not only use the short narratives that I wrote to generate themes, but to include the narratives themselves as part of the final research text, which is this thesis. Although I wrote the short narratives merely as part of the process of analysis, through the process of writing I found that the narratives themselves, and not just the themes, were what I wanted to offer to represent the women's experiences as closely as possible. As an example of the re-reading involved in qualitative analysis, after having written the short narratives, I went back to the themes I had identified through the use of Atlas.ti©, refined them and used them as yet another lens through which the short narratives could be illuminated. Presenting the short narratives as well as the narrative threads provides a way of resolving the tension between the need to honour women's stories as well as produce a new way of reflecting on the experiences of the women within the context of what is currently known in this area of research. This way of resolving the tension is also congruent with a feminist standpoint epistemology, which advocates for the production of knowledge from women's material experiences, without losing sight of the context in which these experiences occur.

Adopting an Ethical Attitude

The central purpose of narrative research is to solicit stories of peoples' experiences and to reflect on these stories in the hope that the insights gained will be of benefit to others. Obtaining stories that are relevant to the researcher's purposes and that also represent what participants choose to speak about, depends on a certain quality of

relationship between the researcher and the participant. Trust and rapport are essential elements of this relationship. During the research process the researcher is responsible for ensuring that participants have freely consented to the research process, that their confidentiality is guarded and that they are protected from any harm as a result of research activities (Josselson, 2007). The dilemmas in the research process arise from the researcher's twofold responsibility to the participant as well as to the requirements of the academic discipline. There are no prescriptions for resolving these dilemmas but what researchers *can* do is adopt an ethical attitude towards the process of narrative research.

The women I recruited for this study were previously participants in a mentoring program for newly arrived Afghan women in which I had an administrative role. The women participants and I are part of the same faith community but they have a different ethnic, linguistic and cultural background from mine. I currently also hold a leadership role within our faith community. During the recruitment phase of the study, I wanted to ensure that the women's consent to participate was not due to any sense of obligation and that the women did not feel coerced in any way. I explained the purpose of my research in an initial phone call and subsequently in the information letter I provided at the beginning of the first interview. I emphasized that my research had no relationship to the program that they had been involved in or to my current leadership role within the faith community. I also emphasized that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that I would not use any data that I had collected if they chose to withdraw. At the start of the first interview I reiterated these points and asked participants to sign a consent form. The consent form also stated that the interviews would be recorded, that all data would be kept confidential and eventually destroyed, that they could request copies

of the transcripts, and that a pseudonym would be used instead of their real names if they preferred. All participants chose to use pseudonyms.

One of the considerations in the research process is the researcher's insider / outsider position with respect to the participants. The notion of positionality is a useful one for framing this issue and refers to the ways in which the researcher is similar to or different from the participants along a number of axes. These can, among others, include race, gender, social class and economic background (Merriam et al., 2001). One of my concerns at the start of the data collection phase was how my insider position in relation to the participants would impact the research. My role in the mentoring program that the women had participated in and my role in our common faith community provided me with an insider position with respect to this group of women. I was aware of some of the challenges the women were facing in the process of settlement, and I was somewhat familiar with their social and cultural contexts. I migrated to Canada when I was sixteen and although my migration experiences were in some ways quite different from the participants', listening to their stories resonated with me and brought back memories of some of my own experiences. At the same time I was also an outsider because of my different ethnic, linguistic, social and cultural background, my length of stay in Canada and my different socio-economic status.

The insider / outsider position of a researcher is not static but is constantly shifting through the research process. The researcher brings her many selves to the research context, and she may be an outsider in some senses but an insider in others. This position may also shift with time as the research project progresses and the relationship between the researcher and the participant develops. I found that my insider position

provided me with a starting point from which to develop trust and rapport with participants. Four out of the five women I contacted readily agreed to participate in the study and were always generous in their willingness to make time in their very busy schedules to meet with me.

I also had to attend to the possibility that my insider positions would mask or make me inattentive to the power differentials between myself and the participants, especially in light of my leadership position within the faith community. Naples (2003) suggests that power differentials are inherent in any researcher/participant relationship and can never be fully erased. She is hopeful though, that power differentials are not fixed but can be renegotiated in the interactions of the research relationship. These differentials can be addressed by using a reflective practice and dialogic techniques to deconstruct research interactions, while at the same time acknowledging and remaining fully cognizant of the limitations of these practices. Strategies for reflective practice include an ongoing awareness of the perspectives as well as social and cultural milieus of participants, the researcher's self-awareness about her own perspective and how this perspective influences each research interaction as well as an ongoing awareness of the researcher's constantly shifting position. Throughout the research interactions, I tried as best as I could to use a reflexive stance by being attentive to my positionality as researcher and by attending to issues of power in my relationships with the women. I tried to accomplish this by reiterating to the women their prerogative to participate in the project or not, by negotiating the times, length and location of the interviews, by allowing the participants to see and modify transcripts if they wished and by protecting the women's anonymity.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodological frameworks that I used to frame and guide this research study. Three approaches were useful and salient to the study and each of these provided a lens through which to view the design of the study, the research methods used and the findings of the study. The narrative approach to qualitative research provided insights into how stories and experiences can be elicited, reflected on, analyzed and presented. This approach helped me in my effort to balance the tension between presenting the stories to reflect women's voices and layering on my own theoretical voice. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach offered a way to attend to and illuminate the ways in which women made meaning of their experiences by "pointing to" the minute details of these experiences and "pointing out" the meaning making and interpretation of these experiences in the contexts of women's lives. These experiences, when examined through a feminist standpoint, provided insights into how the experiences of a marginalized group of women are affected by the structures that situate these experiences. Finally, throughout the study, I tried to maintain a reflexivity about the ways in which my own multiple subject positions and positionality in relation to the participants permeated all aspects of the research study.

CHAPTER 4:

A TAPESTRY OF NARRATIVES

The research questions for this study focused on the relationship between the migration experiences of Afghan women in Canada and their processes of identity renegotiation, and the constraints and enablers they encountered through this process. In this chapter I present short narratives of the women's experiences that speak to these research questions, drawn from the stories the women chose to tell me in the interviews. Each narrative can be seen as a fragment of a tapestry woven from the many threads of their lives, representing their complex and intertwined experiences.

Introduction to Narratives

For this study, I spoke to four women who left Afghanistan and eventually migrated to Canada via Pakistan. Soraya and Aziza are in their late twenties (twenty-seven and twenty-nine) and Hasina and Samera are in their early thirties (thirty-three and thirty-four). The two younger women both left Afghanistan when they were sixteen before completing their high school education. The two older women left in their early twenties. Samera had completed her university education and Hasina was in her second year of university. Along with thousands of other refugees, the women and their families left Afghanistan because of the dangerous situation and the threat to their safety. They managed to safely cross the border into Pakistan to escape the rule of the Mujahideen. The women spent four to five years in Pakistan hoping that the situation in Afghanistan would improve and that they would be able to go back to their homes and lives. However, as the years went by and the conflict in Afghanistan continued, the women and their

families decided that it was best to try and find a more permanent and stable home for themselves. They applied for and were successful in obtaining refugee status in Canada through a program sponsored by FOCUS Canada, a humanitarian assistance non-governmental organization. FOCUS Canada had partnered with the Canadian Federal government to facilitate the migration of Afghan refugees to Canada through a private sponsorship program (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The four women arrived in Canada between the years 1999 and 2001 and have now been in Canada for six to eight years.

Soraya's story

Soraya was in Grade 10 in Afghanistan when life started to change because of the increasing levels of conflict in her home city of Kabul. Until then she led a peaceful life as an enthusiastic high school student. Soraya is the eldest child and only daughter in a family of eight. She lived with her large extended family and was always surrounded by the familiar faces of family and neighbours. Her father, together with her uncles, owned two stores which sold tires and tire by-products.

Life suddenly changed when the strife ongoing in the rest of Afghanistan moved into Kabul. Many schools closed down but a few remained open for those who wanted to keep attending. Soraya was among the few students who continued to attend school in spite of the risks of venturing outside the house. Even though many students, especially girls, stopped attending classes, she stubbornly continued going and her family supported her in her desire to finish the year and complete her grade ten. Soraya remembers spending most of grade eleven and twelve of high school in the hallways because these were safer than the classrooms and provided some protection against the bombs. The teaching continued in the hallways where several grades would be taught together. Over

the next two years the situation in Kabul became progressively worse as levels of conflict in the city escalated. Women had a more difficult time than men because of the greater restrictions placed on their movement outside the home, first by the Mujahideen and later to a much greater degree by the Taliban. "You couldn't go outside without…[your] brother, or father or husband…before it wasn't so bad but after the Mujahideen came, it was kind of scary. Wherever you went, you were going either with [your] brother or father."

Like many others, Soraya and her family tried to get through these difficult times and cope with the situation as best they could. However, one day a group of Taliban soldiers came to their house and took some money as well as her fifteen year old younger brother with them. The neighbours saw this take place and ran to tell Soraya's father at his store. The kidnappers then sent a message to the house demanding money for his safe return. This was a tactic commonly used by Taliban soldiers at the time to extract money from people in exchange for the lives of family members, and the soldiers had been known to kill people if their demands for money were turned down. Luckily, Soraya's father had a connection with a sympathetic member of the Taliban who was able to secure her brother's release, and the brother was returned safely to the family. This incident scared the family and it was at this point that they decided that they could no longer safely stay in Kabul. Three days later, they packed a few of their belongings and all twenty-two members of the extended family left Kabul quietly.

> Just in one day, because we didn't want any of our neighbours to know…we gathered all the necessary stuff that we could…without [telling]…anybody, we

just moved. We locked our house and we told one of our neighbours to watch after our house.

The family stuffed whatever valuables they could inside mattresses and left these and most of their belongings behind so as not to arouse suspicion when traveling. At that time they were sure that they would be back in a month or two when the situation in Kabul calmed down.

The journey to the border was a scary one because they were afraid of being robbed along the way or of being sent back to their homes. However, Soraya and her family managed to arrive safely in Rawalpindi after the stressful experience of crossing the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. In Rawalpindi, they stayed with a family member until they found a place of their own.

Soraya and her family ended up spending four years in Rawalpindi. This was a difficult period for the family because there were few income generating activities available to the parents and it was hard to survive financially. Younger children were able to attend schools set up for refugee children but there were no classes for high school students. The language of instruction in the Pakistani high schools was Urdu so Soraya was unable to continue grade twelve. To occupy her time, she started taking part-time English classes in the evening. The school she attended also held classes for younger children but since there were no qualified teachers available, some of the older students volunteered to teach the younger ones. After a couple of months Soraya decided to volunteer as well. She chose to teach mathematics because she felt her English language skills were not very good and that it would be easier to teach mathematics than other subjects. Although Soraya did not really enjoy teaching young children, there were not

many other activities to participate in and she felt that at least she was improving her English language through the teaching.

During these four years, the situation in Afghanistan worsened rather than improved as the family had initially hoped.

> I think, all the time we were waiting for the time that the situation gets better and we can go back to Afghanistan. We were staying for four years in Pakistan but each time we were just hoping and waiting that we can go back to Afghanistan. But that time never came.

For Soraya's family, the continuing political instability in Afghanistan accompanied by the tenuous circumstances of life in Pakistan spurred the decision to find another home for themselves. With some degree of regret and ambivalence, they decided to look to Canada as a possible destination.

> In a way I was happy. When we were in Pakistan my parents had so much, had so [many] problems. I was thinking that if there is little bit hope that they could go to Canada, all these problems will be finished. But in another way, I was missing my country. I wouldn't be able to go back.

In 2000, Soraya's family decided to apply for refugee status in Canada through a private sponsorship program. The selection criteria in this program placed a premium on English language and computer skills, so the teachers who taught at the schools for refugee children were given priority. Although Soraya and her family did not have much of a sense of what life in Canada would be like, they were anxious to start a new life in a country that offered some hope of peace and stability.

When Soraya and her family arrived in Edmonton, they found it fairly easy to settle down. Their basic needs were looked after by non-profit organizations which provided services to new immigrants, and her family soon settled into their new lives. Soraya was now finally able to start picking up the threads of her interrupted education. Entering medical school did not seem to be a possibility because of language barriers as well as the length of the program. As a new immigrant, Soraya felt she needed to choose a short program in which her English language skills would not be as much of a challenge so she chose to pursue an accounting diploma. She found the courses she took fairly easy and enjoyed her time in the program.

Soraya has now decided to pursue a university degree in accounting because she feels there will be greater job opportunities available to her with a degree rather than a diploma. She has also decided to enroll in the Certified General Accountants (CGA) program for the additional accreditation. For the past year, Soraya has had a part-time accounting job in a small private firm. Although she likes this position, she would prefer to work in a larger company where the tasks are more challenging and where she can acquire a broader perspective of and experience in the accounting field. At this point, Soraya seems content with the educational and career choices she has made and feels that there will be many job opportunities available to her once she graduates with her degree in accounting.

Soraya has no desire to go back to Afghanistan. She feels that she has a better life in Canada than she would have had in Afghanistan because she has the freedom and the opportunity to participate in formal education and to choose a career. In Afghanistan she would probably have been married by the time she was eighteen or nineteen. When

Soraya and her family applied for refugee status in Canada, it was with the hope of living in a peaceful country and having ample education opportunities:

> In terms of peace, it's so good, there are so many people from different countries but they never have any conflict. All the time they are listening to each other and respecting each other. It was sounding good. …The hope was that it's a peaceful country; we can live [with] a peaceful mind. And the other thing was education, we can continue our education. So these two points are so important.

Soraya and her family felt that migrating to and settling in Canada would open the doors to "education and freedom - that's everything."

Aziza's Story

Aziza was in grade eight or nine when the Mujaheedin first took over Kabul. For nine months she and her family were restricted to their homes and immediate neighbourhoods and hardly went out.

> I was in grade 7 or 8 when Mujahideen occupied Afghanistan...when Mujahideen came, they didn't allow girls to [go to] school. …they were fighting between themselves and they were bombing Afghanistan…The fighting was so much; I remember, nine months we couldn't go out. Everybody stayed home because of the bombing…the fighting was street-to-street, neighbour-to-neighbour…we were hiding in our homes because of the bombing.

When the fighting became very severe, Aziza's family left Kabul and for about seven months took refuge in a small village outside the city where it was safer. However, there was not much to occupy them there so they decided to return to Kabul in the hope that they would be able to leave Afghanistan with the help of family members who had

migrated to Canada some ten or twelve years before. The violence in the city continued to increase and almost became an expected part of their daily lives. Aziza describes an incident that occurred shortly before they left Afghanistan:

> One day I took [the] bus…with my mom. Because the bus was so crowded…we were pushing to get off. I said [to] my mom, "Okay stop, let them go first." You know what happened at same time when we got off? There was a bomb just in front of us. I screamed, I didn't know what happened, I just saw the smoke and the sounds, it was so crazy. Still I can hear it…When I came home I started crying and crying…still I remember that scene. It's so scary. But then…we [got] kind of used to that, because it was everyday life, you know? You know that they are going to come and kill someone.

Soon after, Aziza and her family decided to leave Afghanistan for Pakistan. Once they arrived in Pakistan, they felt a sense of relief at having escaped the ongoing fear and tension they had experienced in Kabul. "When we came to Pakistan, we relaxed. Mentally, we relaxed. You're not as scared [that a] bomb is going to come to kill you." Aziza and her family spent six years in Pakistan waiting to migrate to Canada. Because their extended family was not able to help them leave, they had to apply for refugee status through the Canadian government programs for refugee sponsorship.

While Aziza was in Pakistan, she attended part-time English language classes and was eventually hired to teach the younger children in the school she was attending. There were no opportunities for her to continue her formal education but teaching provided her with some income as well as the opportunity to improve her English language skills. The administrator at the school was helping teachers apply for refugee status in Canada and

she suggested that Aziza and her brother send in their applications first and then sponsor their families once they were successful. Aziza and her brother considered themselves lucky to finally be accepted into this process, since many hundreds of people were waiting for the same opportunity.

When Aziza and her brother arrived in Vancouver, they faced enormous challenges. Aziza was only twenty-two but she had to find a way to earn money for her brother and herself as well as to augment her family's income in Pakistan. Aziza very quickly realized that her English language skills, even though they were better than those of many other new immigrants, would be a barrier to finding a good job. She felt that she needed to quickly improve her English but also wanted to complete her interrupted high school education. Initially, the only job she could find where her lack of language skills would not be a barrier was working in the kitchen at a fast food place. She was paid the minimum wage and was only able to get a four-hour shift but it took her four hours to get to and from work. Although she and her brother were staying with extended family who only asked for a small contribution towards their keep, the income from this job was not sufficient. After a year or so, Aziza managed to get a second full-time job in the security area at the Vancouver airport and was paid a little better. She was also taking part-time English language classes. These classes are only funded for a short time so Aziza had no option but to work at the two jobs to make enough money to survive and send to her parents, while taking English classes at the same time.

> For me it was really hard because I was the oldest, I had to support my family, at the same to study. But I was tired of studying part-time because I knew if I studied just part-time I wouldn't get anywhere. There's so many classes to finish.

Aziza and her brother lived on their own for three years before the rest of the family was able to join them. At this point they decided to move to Edmonton, since living in Vancouver posed too many financial challenges. However, this meant that Aziza had to start all over again to search for a job that would pay enough to contribute to the family income as well as to pay for her education. Aziza tried all kinds of jobs. She worked as a security guard at a mall, as a cashier at a gas station and in a parking lot, often working up to sixteen hours a day at a combination of jobs. This seemed to be a low point in her life and she was frustrated at not being able to move ahead with what she really wanted to do, which was to continue her formal education:

> By the time I came home, I was tired. I did that job I think for six months or something, then I couldn't because it killed me. And I couldn't go to school, nothing. Because sixteen hours, when you have job, there's no time to go to school… You cannot go like so crazy, sixteen hours a day. You can't get anywhere.

A breakthrough finally occurred when Aziza managed to find a job providing home care. In this job she had to work a forty-eight hour shift every week from Friday to Sunday evening. The job paid well and freed up her time during the week which meant that she could finally spend some time, money and energy on her education. However, she still needed financial help because her efforts to obtain loans were not successful. At one point she tried to obtain help from a community organization that provided loans to students but they kept ignoring her application and eventually turned her down. Aziza was disappointed, angry and frustrated with this rejection. In her view, this was an organization that she should have been able to rely on to help her out of her financial

predicament, but they didn't come through. This setback with financial help was hard to cope with but by this time Aziza was determined not to rely on help from others and to keep working towards her goal of continuing her education: "But because nobody helps you…you have to do it your own. Don't expect other people to. You know, that's what I learned." She took on another part-time job, and used her credit card to pay for as many courses as she could afford each semester. She registered in the diploma accounting program at a community college where it took her three years to complete the two-year program. Aziza had opted to take the co-op stream of the program, and for the two work semesters required for the program, she worked at a large accounting firm. This firm was impressed with her ability to take on challenging tasks and her commitment to the job, and offered her a permanent job when she graduated with her diploma. Aziza has found the job challenging but she likes this because it forces her to keep learning. Some of her classmates have been employed by the provincial government and have higher salaries, but their jobs are relatively easy and don't provide the variety of learning opportunities that her job does. At this point, Aziza is not content with the diploma and has started working towards her degree in accounting. She is taking distance university courses and much prefers these courses to face-to-face classroom courses because she can better manage the multiple demands of her courses and her part-time work. The distance courses also allow her to work at her own pace because she often finds the pace in the face-to-face learning environment too slow.

In spite of all the challenges she faced, Aziza was determined to get an education and was not going to give up:

> I didn't want to be…someone who's working forever at MacDonald's, or [in] security, you know? Even now, I want to keep going. I will do my applied degree by next year, because at fourth year I have to work, because it's applied degree. I will work. And even after that I will not stop…

Aziza keeps going because she always loved school and studying and felt that pursing a formal education and career path would help her "be someone." Secondly, she received a lot of encouragement from her parents who had not had the opportunity for a formal education. She emphasized that, unlike other immigrant families who had arrived recently, her family didn't expect the younger siblings to contribute towards the household income and instead encouraged them to attend school. In fact, her parents insisted that a post-secondary education was an absolute necessity for all the children. As the eldest, Aziza took on the burden of supporting her family so that her younger brothers and sisters would have more freedom to pursue an education than she herself had. Other families made earning income a priority when they arrived in Canada and now own a house and cars, but Aziza's family still has an old car and they live in a small apartment. They have deferred these major purchases to a time when all the children have finished their first degrees and are able to be financially independent.

Aziza feels that the move to Canada has provided her with opportunities for formal education, to choose and pursue her plans for a career and to be independent. She commented that if she was in Afghanistan, she would probably have four or five children by now, no education and no career, and would probably not be financially well off. In Canada she has the kinds of freedoms that as a woman in Afghanistan she would not have had, so her life is very different here. In spite of the challenges she has faced, at this point

in her life Aziza is fairly satisfied with what she has been able to accomplish since moving to Canada.

Hasina's story

Hasina was 21 years old when she left Afghanistan with her family in 1994. The decision to move, as for many other people, was a sudden one based on fear for the safety of the family. The family fled to Pakistan with a few personal belongings but left their house, business and most of their possessions behind, expecting to go back to Afghanistan as soon as the situation became stable. As it turned out, they never went back.

In Afghanistan, "life was good" before all the unrest and turmoil began. Hasina grew up in a middle class family, where her father was a shopkeeper and her mother worked in an office. Some of her fondest memories of growing up are of spending time in her father's grocery shop. From the time she was eight years old, Hasina would go to the shop everyday after school to help her father. The shop was a busy place but she would often run it on her own when her father went out to replenish goods for the store. This task of helping her father would normally fall to the boys in the family or an older sibling but since Hasina's brothers had left home and her older sister was working, the job fell to Hasina. Because she spent so much time with her father, Hasina always felt she had a very special relationship with him and thought of herself as her father's favourite child and the center of his attention. Hasina enjoyed school and was considered a good student because she attended regularly, worked hard and always received good marks, which garnered approval from her family. The family was very close and spent a lot of their free time together, very unlike their present life in Canada.

From the time she was quite young, Hasina had decided that she wanted to be a journalist. A friend of hers had always talked about journalism and Hasina was intrigued by this career. When she finished high school, she applied for entrance to university and although her marks were not sufficient to be admitted to the program of her choice, she persisted in her efforts to enroll in the journalism program and eventually succeeded. She enjoyed her two years of university because she had the opportunity to meet all kinds of people, girls and boys (high school was segregated). The courses were hard but she enjoyed them. The first two years were mostly spent on theory but at the end of the second year they were starting to get more practical journalism experience, doing interviews, using recording and other equipment and getting a feel for what the real work of journalism would be like.

Hasina's time at university came to an abrupt end in 1992 when the Mujahideen took control of Kabul and it became increasingly more dangerous to leave the house. Although there had been unrest in other parts of Afghanistan for some time, the city of Kabul had been fairly safe until then. That year, the violent conflict between different groups within the city increased, many schools and businesses closed down and normal activities were suspended because people were afraid to leave their homes. Hasina and her family would go the basement of their house when the bombing started and wait there until it was safe to come back up. The family was constantly afraid that their house would be attacked or that they would be caught in the fighting when they went out. Activities which provided income had to be severely curtailed and it was difficult to purchase food. The area where Hasina and her family lived stayed relatively safe but there were many other areas in Kabul in which people were injured from the bombing and other violence

and lost their houses and other assets. Survival became a tenuous affair and people were often unsure about whether they would still be alive at the end of the day.

During these two years, Hasina was unable to attend university so she filled her time reading novels and doing embroidery work which could be sold to earn money for the family. Finally in 1994, the situation had worsened to a point where Hasina's father decided that they should leave Afghanistan and head for Pakistan. Overnight, Hasina and her family hurriedly packed a few belongings and took a bus to a town on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. From there they were able to cross the border and travel to Rawalpindi where they lived for the next two years.

While they were in Pakistan, their life was relatively easy. Hasina's older sister worked as a tailor and earned money for the family and her brother also sent them money from Denmark. Unlike other families who lived in refugee camps, they were able to afford an apartment. In Pakistan, Hasina was still not able to continue her university education but instead took English classes on a part-time basis in a school that had been set up for Afghan refugees to prepare them for leaving Afghanistan and migrating to another country. After some time, a few of the students were asked if they would like to teach younger children attending this school. Hasina became one of the teachers and taught English and mathematics for two years before leaving for Canada. Hasina enjoyed the teaching experience because it occupied her time and also enabled her to earn some money.

Hasina describes their time in Pakistan as being "in the middle of nowhere." They knew they had no future in Pakistan but there seemed little possibility of returning to Afghanistan in the short term. Eventually, with some help from the administrator of the

school where Hasina was teaching, she and her family were able to apply for refugee status in Canada. Hasina's family looked on this move to Canada with some ambivalence. They were sad at the thought they would not be able to go back to their homeland but Canada offered the possibility of educational and other opportunities and it seemed to be their only choice, given the situation in Afghanistan. Hasina and her sisters came to Canada first and their parents followed soon after.

When Hasina arrived in Canada, she had to make the decision about whether to continue studying journalism. She looked into the journalism program at a community college but she felt that her English language skills would be a problem and that it would be hard to express herself in English to the level that the journalism program would require. Hasina next decided to apply for admission into a Social Work program, but the counsellor she spoke to at the college told her that she would have to study for about five hours a day and that it would be lot of hard work to get through the program. Since Hasina also had to work part-time, this requirement was discouraging and Hasina felt that she would not be able to commit this amount of effort to the program. She was also two marks short of the minimum mark required for English – this meant that she would have to wait another year, upgrade her English mark and then reapply. At that point in her life, Hasina felt that it was "better to take something easy to find a job and continue with your life." Hasina conveys the sense of urgency shared by many new immigrants to quickly settle down to a stable life and income and this sense led her to make decisions that she now regrets. In the end, Hasina chose to enroll in an office administration program at another community college because it was short and relatively inexpensive and would provide her with job opportunities more quickly than other programs. Having a diploma

would also provide validation from others in her community. Although Hasina feels that it is too late in her life to pursue a journalism program, she also regrets not having pursued her dreams. She sees this as a result of a lack of motivation on her part and an inability to put effort into things.

At present, Hasina is still struggling to find a full-time job. She is not entirely happy with her decision to pursue the office administration program since it is regarded by others as not being as worthwhile as, for example, a career in nursing, where she could earn more money and which would give her a more definite professional designation. She feels she is at a low point in her life, but finds it hard to pinpoint the cause of feeling this way: "I feel more depressed for no reason." Her relationship with her family has worsened in the last year to a point where she barely speaks to her older sister and mother. She is very attached to her father but is frustrated by not being able to do anything about his sense of loss and loneliness after coming to Canada. If she had been in Afghanistan she might have been working as a journalist, been married and had her own family. Instead she feels that she is dependent on her immediate family, both financially and to help her make decisions about her life, and that she has little say in family matters since her older sister's opinions hold more weight in the family. She has gone from feeling like her father's favourite and central to the family to feeling left out and on the periphery. This is quite a contrast from when she first arrived and spent most of her time attending classes and studying, which gave her a sense of accomplishment from the good marks she got in her courses, and made her family proud of her.

Hasina feels that part of the problem is that she doesn't want to give up her values of a strong family unit where each person in the family is valued and respected, so she

has a hard time coping with home and other situations where she feels that she doesn't receive this respect. She would like the family to be close again, to spend time together, but the stress they each encounter in their lives creates barriers between them. Even in the part-time job that she has, Hasina feels that her co-workers don't respect her, and sometimes take it on themselves to comment on her work ethic. Hasina feels that her faith should sustain her and help her get through this period, but it doesn't. "I don't complain about these things, I say thanks. But there is [a] thing inside that hurts. …I shouldn't be this much sad and feel the pain and feel lonely." Hasina feels that through her transition experiences, her difficulties with language, with choosing a career path, with financial constraints, with seeking and finding employment and with changing family dynamics, have greatly eroded her sense of confidence in herself. Finding a life partner is another issue that Hasina grapples with. She would like to marry someone from Afghanistan and from her own tribe who has similar values, but the community in Edmonton is very small so it is hard to meet people. The stress increases as she gets older since in the Afghan community, the early 20s are considered the ideal age for girls to get married. Although Hasina's family does not pressure her to get married as is often the case with other families, she knows that her position in the community is affected by the fact that she is 34 and still single. She contrasts how she feels now with the sense of freedom, the ability to make decisions, and the sense of confidence she had when she was in Afghanistan. Hasina feels that, in Canada, she has become a different person:

> ...that value that I had before, slowly, slowly I lost it, it's not the same that I used to be. Once you lose this thing, slowly you put down yourself and somebody else says something to you and ….that puts you down too.

Hasina feels that she has lost a sense of who she is, and feels "lost" at this point in her life.

Samera's Story

Samera arrived in Canada six years ago with her husband and two children. She left Afghanistan in 1996 in the midst of much fear, violence and chaos just after the Taliban seized control of the city of Kabul. Although Kabul had been in a state of turmoil since about 1992, the arrival of the Taliban made the situation much worse, especially for women. It was one week after the Taliban arrived that Samera and her family decided to leave. Samera was twenty-three years old at the time, had completed her university education in the medical program and had been working in a hospital for six months. The medical program was six years long and the last two years had been extremely difficult because Samera had to attend classes and complete her practicum in a situation of war. Many people she knew had already left Afghanistan to seek safety in refugee camps in Pakistan, but her family stayed on so that she could finish her sixth year and graduate. Samera and her husband were worried that if they left, she would not be able to resume her education and that the years she had spent in university would be wasted. This would have been a major disappointment because from the time she was very little, Samera had wanted to become a doctor. The medical profession was an occupation that had a great degree of status and recognition but was also difficult to gain admittance to, and it was assumed that students who received good marks in school would enter this field. Samera's classmates encouraged her along this path and though her parents never explicitly told her that they wanted her to become a doctor, as an only child they had high expectations of her. Her father was a school teacher, tutored students after school and

also wrote and designed books. As a result, Samera's home environment was one in which academic excellence was expected.

> My father never told me I have to be a doctor and my mom never told me I have to be a doctor but all the time, when I listened to my classmates and my teachers, they told me, "Oh, you will be a doctor, we know you will be a doctor."

Samera recalled that even when she was very young and would visit relatives, they would greet her by saying "Ah doctor, small doctor, come in, come in." Samera had another reason for wanting to become a doctor. She was an only child and her mother had suffered the derision of her extended family and community in a culture that places a higher value on women who have many children, especially male children. Husbands are often encouraged to leave their first wives and marry again or take a second wife who can have more children. Samera tried to convince her father that he need not worry about not having a son and that she would not marry and would look after her parents the way a son would be expected to. But Samera's father succumbed to family pressure and eventually married again, causing Samera's mother a great deal of pain and sadness. This situation affected Samera profoundly and her dream was to become a gynecologist so that she could help women like her mother have more children if they wanted to, to save them from the indignity of having their husbands marry a second wife.

Life in Afghanistan was very difficult after the war started. In addition to the stress of getting through her university program and the tension between her parents, there were other events that added to her family's difficulties. During those years of war, many family members were killed and every year they mourned the loss of some one else. Her father lost three brothers during the war and some of their children came to live

with Samera's family. Her parents now had the additional burden of bringing up these children, adding to their difficulties in what were already troubled times.

During her last year of university, Samera married a cousin who had lived with her family since his parents' death. The situation was dangerous and Samera's family felt that a married woman would be safer. Marriages within extended families were common and were encouraged to reduce the uncertainty that would come from marrying a stranger. This practice was seen as a way of keeping family values, practices and lifestyles intact. Before Samera's grandfather died, he had also expressed the wish that Samera would marry her eldest cousin and Samera's parents felt obliged to fulfill his wishes. Samera did not really want to get married at this point since she had barely graduated and wanted time to determine her life path and to consider other marriage proposals she had received. However, the constant pressure from her family to marry her cousin and the urgency of the war situation eventually wore her down, so Samera got married during the last month of her practicum. Right after Samera got married, she became pregnant and she had her first child in Afghanistan. Samera had an intensely difficult and traumatic childbirth, and was very ill for quite some time. Meanwhile, the situation in Kabul was steadily worsening and in 1996 Samera, with her husband, her six-month old child and her parents finally fled from their home to find refuge in Pakistan.

Once Samera and her family settled into a refugee camp in Karachi, she and her husband, who is a pharmacist, were quickly enlisted to help run the medical clinic. The camp was short of doctors and the Pakistani doctors had trouble communicating with the refugees from Afghanistan. To them, Samera was a godsend. For the first two years, Samera worked in a maternity hospital, fulfilling her dream of working as a gynecologist.

For another two years, Samera worked in a general clinic as a family physician. Even though she had not had much experience working as a doctor in Afghanistan, some of the Pakistani doctors took her under their wing and mentored her. Through the four years of working in the camps, Samera was able to help many refugee families. Through those years she became well known throughout the refugee camps – everyone knew who Dr. Samera was. Samera had a second child during this time and her mother looked after the two children so that she could continue working. Samera looks back on this period in her life with a great deal of satisfaction and could have gone on living and working in Pakistan indefinitely. But she and her husband knew that living in Pakistan was only temporary and that there was no future for them there. As Canada was accepting large numbers of refugees and also seemed to provide opportunities for a better future for their children, they started to apply for refugee status in Canada. After some disappointing setbacks and after having spent almost five years living and working in Pakistan, Samera and her husband finally managed to get their visas to leave. Samera arrived in Canada excited about the many opportunities that would be available to her.

> When we came [at the] end of 2001…during that time I was very excited. I thought if I'm…in Canada…I'm going to do something good..If I want any kind of study I can do it, I will be able to do it.

She had realized that her professional credentials would not be recognized right away but she was hopeful that she would be able to overcome what she thought would be minor hurdles and quickly adjust to their new life in Canada. However, by the end of the first few weeks she began to see that things were going to be much more difficult than she had envisioned.

The first challenge she encountered was her English. She had studied and spoken some English both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan but when she watched TV for the first time in Canada, she was quite disappointed that she could hardly understand what was being said. It was at this point that it dawned on her that language was going to be much more of a challenge than she had expected. Samera joined the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes right away and her husband got a job at a print shop, cutting paper.

Within three months of arriving in Canada, Samera discovered that she was pregnant again. She had not planned to have another child so soon after arriving and she knew it would be very hard to cope with this situation, given all the difficulties they were beginning to encounter. "I already have two kids and we are new and we don't have jobs. I wanted to make my life first, to make myself something, to be something. And after that [having more] children is okay." Samera felt that one solution would be to sponsor her mother who could then come and look after her children while she continued studying. But another challenge presented itself. The tests that she underwent at three months of pregnancy revealed the possibility that she might have a child with Down's syndrome or some other abnormality. Over the next month, Samera underwent more tests and it finally seemed that the initial test was misleading and that the baby would be healthy, but this experience had greatly added to the stress that Samera and her family were already undergoing. Samera continued with her LINC classes during her pregnancy and her third child was born healthy one year after their arrival in Canada.

Over the next little while, Samera made contact with an organization composed of internationally trained medical doctors who supported each other to prepare to write the

Canadian medical exams and to obtain their accreditation. Although she joined this group, she was very disappointed to discover that chances of obtaining accreditation were very slim. One woman had written the exam seven times and another person fourteen times, but they had still not passed. The exams were extremely difficult and the fees to write the exams were very high. After passing the initial exam, there was a second exam to write followed by a period of residency at a hospital. Some doctors never managed to be placed as residents because of the low priority given to internationally trained doctors. At the end of the residency there was one more final exam to write. Each exam would cost about a thousand dollars to write and the whole process could take up to ten years with no guarantee of success at the end. With limited financial means and three young children, this was an almost impossible situation for Samera. She had not anticipated all the barriers she would face and this realization took away many of the hopes she had of eventually working as doctor in Canada. Samera began to think that she might have to choose another career path and start over again.

However, over the next year and a half, as she looked after her new baby and the other children while working part-time in the retail sector, Samera kept hoping that she would find some way to go back to being a doctor. She studied her medical textbooks whenever she had the time and waited for her mother to arrive from Afghanistan so that she would have some help with the children. But three years went by before her mother was able to join them. Samera spent these three years looking into different options that might be open to her. Many of the health related education programs she considered had various admissions requirements that Samera could not meet, and her hope of accessing "the best education in the world" when she came to Canada started fading. At this point,

Samera has applied for entrance to several different programs and is waiting to hear what she might be admitted into. But four and half years after arriving in Canada, Samera has not completely given up her initial hopes. Every once in a while she asks herself whether she should try and write the medical exams, even though she knows that it will be almost impossible for her to succeed.

The settlement period in Canada has been a challenging time for Samera and her family. The loss of family, friends and other networks have added to education and employment challenges:

> …for the first few months, you are home sick. You miss your parents…you can't go by yourself outside, you don't know where you have to go. You don't know anyone...not any relatives over here…in the beginning everything was very difficult for me.

In spite of all the challenges they have faced since arriving in Canada, Samera still expresses a sense of hope about the future. Although Samera recognizes the inequities of a system which failed to recognize her educational credentials and work experience, she ascribes the barriers she has encountered to the 'normal' process of settling in a new country. Samera sees her successful settlement in Canada as an individual responsibility and holds on to the hope that working hard will help overcome these and other barriers: "If you want to do something in your life, if you want to be something, if you do hard work, if you try, you will be successful." She looks forward to the prospects she feels Canada offers her children as well as the opportunity to live in peace: "we are happy because we are living in a peaceful country and our children's future is going to be good. And no war and no tension."

Chapter Summary

A woven tapestry can be appreciated in many different ways. First, it can be viewed as a complete piece of work in the context of the surroundings in which it is displayed. Next, it can be examined more closely to discern the threads and individual motifs that are woven into the tapestry, and finally it can be viewed in a way that reveals broader patterns in the tapestry that may not be initially apparent. Similarly, examining the tapestry of participants' lives can be accomplished by a telling and a retelling of their stories. In this chapter, I presented the women's narratives by situating them within the broad contexts that shaped their lives. In the next chapter, I retell these stories through the narrative threads that represent different aspects of the women's identities. Finally, in Chapter 6, the stories are re-presented to highlight facets of the process of identity renegotiation and strategies women use in the process.

CHAPTER 5:

NARRATIVE THREADS

The participants' individual narratives in the previous chapter set the stage for a presentation of the themes or narrative threads that emerge from the tapestry of the women's stories. Although a multitude of threads are woven into their stories, I have attempted to disentangle the ones that respond to the questions of this study. In this chapter, I explore the answer to the question: What aspects of the women's identities are most salient through the process of migration? The narratives of a woman's life provide insight into not only the events, actions, emotions and interpretations of her life but also the subject positions from which she speaks (Chase, 2005). The narrative threads portrayed in this chapter correspond to the most significant aspects of identity, or subject positions, that participants speak from and about in their stories of migration and settlement.

Disentangling the Narrative Threads

The women I spoke to hold multiple subject positions which have shifted and changed through the process of migration. The term 'subject position' is used to signify the many identities or roles that are available to individuals and those that they take up. These positions are defined not outside of, but within social relations and are culturally and historically produced and circumscribed (Weedon, 1997). As Elenes (1997) states, "identity formation is never a project that any subject constructs by herself. Identities are co-constructed by the subject and society at large" (p. 359). The range of subject positions that are open to individuals can be embraced or rejected, or alternatively,

resisted and renegotiated. The renegotiated subject positions serve to displace existing ones and point to the multiple sites of identity formation. Further, an exploration of the processes of mediation and negotiation can provide insights into the contextual factors, both individual and societal, that affect these processes. Subject positions continue to be in a state of flux throughout one's life and are negotiated and renegotiated in response to changing situations and contexts.

The subject positions that the women in this study spoke about included their national, ethnic and religious identities, their positions in their families and the communities with which they had most contact, their relationships with immediate family members, their educational achievements and professional credentials, their careers and occupations, their level of competence in the English language, their abilities and talents, and the values they felt were most important to them. The process of listening to their stories, reading the transcripts of these stories and writing their narratives provided me with a way to surface the most important aspects of these identities and to see common threads as well as differences in the way the women renegotiated these aspects of their identities and re-imagined their lives.

To respond to the question of how participants in this study renegotiated the many aspects of their identities through the process of migration, I needed to have a perspective on which aspects of their identity they saw as being most important to them at this point in their lives and which were most affected by the process of migration from Afghanistan to Canada. Through this process, I disentangled three aspects of identity that emerged as being most salient to my research question. These three aspects are the (1) women's educational achievements and professional credentials (2) their current occupation and

career path and (3) their positions in and relationships with their families. These three aspects of their identity repeatedly surfaced in our conversations and many of the stories the women told me revolved around these three aspects.

Why did the women choose to speak about these particular subject positions and aspects of their identities? What made these positions and aspects more important to speak about than, for example, their national or ethnic subject positions, or specific positions within their families? The process of settlement and migration to a new land is a complex one, and migrants are faced with many daunting tasks during the initial period of arrival. The priority is to determine the pathways to an occupation that will provide a stable financial situation for both the individual and the family, especially for those migrants who have arrived as refugees and have brought with them few or no material resources. This priority requires acquiring proficiency in English, gaining acceptance and recognition for existing skills and seeking appropriate employment, and when this is not possible, determining a new educational and career path. Services and programs that provide financial aid and other resources for new immigrants may act as buffers during the initial period of settlement but this buffer is often of a short duration and does not shield women from the ongoing challenges of negotiating employment and education activities. The urgency and difficulty of these tasks requires that the aspects of identity related to educational achievement and career are the ones that require the most effort to renegotiate. These renegotiations, however, are not short lived but have been ongoing during the six to eight years that the women have now been in Canada.

The first two important aspects of identity related to educational achievement and career / occupation are interwoven with the third aspect, their relationships with their

families. Renegotiating one aspect of identity results in movements and shifts necessitating the renegotiation of another aspect. The urgency of attaining or upgrading educational and professional credentials, of finding temporary employment as well as having to plan and work towards a longer term career has shifted family relationships and the women's positions in the family, making relationships within their families another important aspect of identity that has to be renegotiated.

Exploring the Narrative Threads

In this section I present the narrative threads related to the three aspects of the women's identities. Through the women's stories and relevant literature, I discuss and analyze the ways in which they are renegotiating each aspect of their identity. As stated above, these three aspects are: (1) the women's educational achievements and professional credentials, (2) their current occupation and career path and (3) their positions in and relationships with their families.

Narrative Thread 1: Renegotiating Educational Achievement and Professional Credentials

The level of educational achievement and professional credentials is an aspect of identity that all four women spoke about extensively. The educational opportunities that the women believed would be available in Canada were a key motivator for migrating and helped the women cope with the ambivalence with which they left Pakistan for Canada. They were glad to leave Pakistan because they felt that there was no future for them there, but leaving also evoked regret at leaving Afghanistan permanently. The

promise of greater educational opportunities was one of the factors that helped assuage the sadness they felt at leaving behind their past lives.

After they arrived in Canada, the women had to make decisions about which educational path to follow. All of them started with English language education but soon had to decide on a career path. The women were not content with a pathway where earning income was a priority and education was excluded. A level of formal educational achievement would, they felt, contribute to being independent and provide a position of status and respect within their family and community. Education was also a way to obtain a good job which would contribute to a secure future and a "good life."

Soraya left Afghanistan for Pakistan when she was only sixteen and in her final year of high school. During her last year of high school, Soraya had started to think about applying for medical school, but her plans were thwarted by the unstable political situation:

> I really liked medicine and that's why I took some courses [to prepare for admission]. …I was so interested in medicine…there was hope that if you can get a good mark you can go…I took that course but I went for three days and after three days the Taliban came.

Soraya's plans for her education had to be abandoned, but her eventual migration to Canada rekindled a sense of hope in anticipation of the unlimited educational opportunities that she had heard would be available in Canada: "When we were going for interviews and filling the [immigration application] papers…we were kind of talking to each other, and they said that the education system over there is so good, you can study as much as you want."

Soon after arrival in Canada, Soraya started ESL classes. She found these boring because the ESL level she was placed in was not challenging enough. After three months, Soraya started to take some high school upgrading courses at a community college. High school upgrading courses are funded for new immigrants but only for a limited time, so it was important for Soraya to quickly decide on a specific career path and program and take all the pre-requisites for this program before the funding ran out. She thought it would be unlikely that she would be accepted into the medical program at the university in Canada, and that both the length of the program and her English language skills would pose insurmountable barriers.

> While I was doing the upgrading I had to choose a field. I thought if I choose medicine it will take longer; and also I should have very good English. I thought that accounting was kind of easier, because I like math and math is not a problem. And English is not a core courses for accounting [so] I just choose accounting.

Soraya completed all the high school pre-requisite courses for the accounting program and was accepted into the year long accounting certificate program at a vocational college. During this program, she decided to continue along this educational path and get her diploma in accounting which took another year. In addition to attending college, Soraya also had a part-time job at a retail store.

Soraya was twenty when she came to Canada, and had not yet invested a lot of time and effort in choosing and pursuing an educational path, and as a result her life course was not interrupted to a great degree through the process of migration. For Soraya, migration to Canada has opened up educational opportunities she may not have had in

Afghanistan, both because of prescribed gender roles and because the ongoing political situation limits educational options.

> [In Afghanistan] I would have been at home all the time. And doing nothing …even right now, my cousins…are going to university but they don't have the same opportunities that people have here…they don't have a quiet place to go, [they don't] have all the equipment they need like the books and the computer…and also, the situation, even right now it's not safe.

In Afghanistan, Soraya would have been less likely to continue her formal education after she married, but in Canada her family has encouraged her to pursue her education to a greater degree than they may have in Afghanistan.

Like Soraya, Aziza was sixteen when she left Afghanistan and her education was also interrupted for a number of years. During her last year in Afghanistan, the turmoil and violence in the city of Kabul made it impossible for her to attend school and in the six years she spent in Pakistan, there were no opportunities to continue her formal education. Aziza's education had been interrupted for seven years so when she arrived in Canada she was anxious to pick up where she had left off. However, Aziza's immediate needs were to earn an income and the long hours she had to spend working prevented her from attending school full-time. It soon became apparent to Aziza that studying part-time was not the best option for her, but she did not have much choice:

> … I was tired of studying part-time, because I knew if I studied just part-time I wouldn't get anywhere. There's so many classes to finish. So I really had [a] hard time, especially when I came to Edmonton. I couldn't find [a] good job that [was]

> well paid ….so I was working like sixteen hours in one day…. by the time I came home, I was done. I didn't want to wake up the next morning.

Aziza managed her financial constraints by working at one or more part-time jobs, taking a few courses at a time and using her credit card to pay her fees when there was no other option. When she eventually registered in a diploma program, she chose the co-op stream so that she could alternate between working and taking courses. The multiple demands of having to work long hours while taking courses slowed Aziza's educational progress considerably.

In the courses Aziza took, especially the ones which required good English language skills, she found it difficult to get high marks and this was a major shift for her since she had loved learning and had been accustomed to being at the top of her class:

> I always had the first position. There it's different; it's not [like] here. Here nobody knows how much you got it, your mark; but there it was different. Like when you got [your marks], you have first-second-third position. I loved school, that's why.

Aziza compared her situation to those of the other students in her class in the diploma program. They had the advantage of not having to work, having privacy and a place to study in their homes, their own computers and access to the Internet. Aziza contrasts this with her own situation: "My classmates, because they have …big houses, and they have their own privacy. When I go home, there is no privacy (laughs), because we live together. It's so kind of noisy and crazy, you cannot study in our place."

The interruptions in Aziza's education after she left Afghanistan were prolonged by the constraints she faced after she arrived in Canada. The multiple demands of earning

a living and focusing on her education at the same time threatened to disrupt Aziza's conception of herself as being a good student and an avid learner.

Renegotiating aspects of identity linked to her education and career took Aziza considerably longer than she had expected. Aziza attributes her success at overcoming barriers to her determination to move ahead and not give up, even through all her difficulties, and to setting long-term goals for herself.

> It was [a] bad experience, but I didn't give up. When I came here, I worked hard. I didn't want to stay in the same place, to get my education. And still I will go for my degree. I will not stop.

Aziza talks about the importance of always having a plan, and of re-imagining a future for herself:

> Because in life, you should have a plan. …you have to imagine yourself in three-four years, you have to be there. ….some people… they live day by day. They don't have plan…just sleep, work, come home. They don't imagine themselves. …I'm kind of wondering why people live like that. It's always good to have a plan. … I know that what you plan doesn't get you there, but at least I think that you will be closer to it. Maybe not in five years, maybe in six-seven years, but you will be closer.

Unlike Soraya and Aziza, Hasina was older when she left Afghanistan and had already started a university program. When Hasina was quite young she had decided that she wanted to be a journalist. She was able to complete two years of a journalism program before this educational path was interrupted because of the war conditions in Afghanistan. Through the transition from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to Canada,

Hasina held on to the hope that she would be able to continue along this path in Canada, but when she arrived here, she discovered that her language skills would be a major barrier.

One of the reasons Hasina was not able to enroll in a program of her choice, which would have been either journalism or social work, was her level of English writing skills. The language classes that Hasina took did not provide her with the writing skills she would need in these programs, and this shortcoming in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes was echoed by other participants in this study. The multiple demands of learning a new language, keeping a part-time job to contribute to the family income, achieving good grades and worrying about her family's well-being were overwhelming and Hasina felt that the only way she could cope would be to enroll in a program which would demand less time and effort. Although Hasina states that she is happy that she has completed a one-year office administration program, she also has trouble working through and accepting this new way of defining herself. On one hand, she states:

> When I came here, I was happy and still I am happy that at least I got education, at least I finished something. Nobody will say look at her, she went all her life and still she doesn't have education, high school. It's ok if I don't have a degree or a diploma or something, but still I am happy with myself, what I have. I don't regret that.

On the other hand, she compares herself with other women and expresses her sadness at not having accomplished more:

> Other girls came later than me, they already got their degree [after] four years. … when I compare myself to them, I really feel down that I couldn't do it because of the age or maybe because of the English language or maybe because of not too much concentration, because [there] is school that you have to concentrate, and … beside school you have other pressure, other stress from home and from work. Your life is not the same like other people … maybe I couldn't balance it or maybe… I couldn't concentrate that much. ...That makes me sad, that's why. So it's different.

A diploma in office administration does not have the same status as say, a career in nursing:

> …some people say, just office administration, oh in 6 yrs you could do better than that, you could [be] a nurse, something different that has a name and money wise was good for you. You did something that's not worth it.…even [if] you don't go to school, you can be an office receptionist.

For many years, as she grew up and even after her arrival in Canada, Hasina saw herself as being capable of getting high marks and receiving recognition for her achievements. She had dreams of achieving a high level of education and a career that would have status and recognition. This image of herself has been disrupted through the move to Canada. She had trouble with her marks in the high school courses she took, even though she put a lot of effort into them. "Back home I used to study, and …. my mark was really high, everyone was happy with me, at home, at school, my class mates…back home I was the captain of my class…. everybody was listening to me." Hasina has to re-imagine a new life in the context of this changed sense of herself and a

shift from being in the centre to being in the margins in terms of educational achievement.

Although a high level of educational achievement is one of the ways that Hasina defines herself, she is also ambivalent about its impact on her life because in some ways it also contributes to an interrupted life course. It is harder for women who have high levels of education to meet a life partner since families expect the partner to have at least the same or higher level of education. Families of potential partners may be reluctant to accept a daughter-in-law who has a higher level of education than their sons:

> … when you are educated, when you go to university, and when you open your mouth, the other side, the boy [would feel], I am not matching her because she is so talkative and she is so intelligent, and they will not go for you (laughter).

This was an issue in Afghanistan but becomes a bigger problem in Canada where the size of the community limits the potential partners for women. In spite of the barriers she has faced in pursuing her education and career path, Hasina still values and is committed to achieving a greater degree of formal education and has plans for what she would like "to be."

In contrast to the other women in the study, Samera left Afghanistan when she was older, and she had already acquired educational qualifications and work experience in Afghanistan. The formation of Samera's identity as a doctor started early in her life. When she was very young, her family started referring to her as the "little doctor" and Samera went through school envisioning this future for herself and preparing for it. She attended extra classes, studied long hours to get good marks and wrote the entrance exams for university. Everyone expected her to be admitted into the medical program and

those expectations were met when Samera's name appeared at the top of the list of students who were admitted into the program.

> Because it's very tough, very tough, really. From our school, only five girls, they went to the medical school. … I saw my name on the first line, I thought I'm in dream…I did this (pinches self). And then three times I went there, and saw my name and my number. … I was very, very excited. Very happy, very, very happy.

Samera's seven years in university were marked by many events. In these years, the changes in political leadership in Afghanistan were accompanied by turmoil and strife and this situation intensified when the conflict between Mujahideen factions brought the conflict into Kabul and into closer proximity. During her last few years the situation in Kabul grew increasingly unsafe and it was dangerous to attend classes. Samera was married during her last year at university and the six month practicum at the end of her program was interrupted by a difficult childbirth and long period of recovery, but Samera persisted through these challenging times and finally received her medical degree with a huge sense of pride and accomplishment:

> Really, I was proud [of] my education. … my father and my mother, all of them, they said, "This is your effort, you did hard work…during the night there was no light, you studied by a lamp or a candle." And you know, my nose was black in the morning. … It was not easy. … It was very tough, but I [was] proud [of] my effort.

After her arrival in Canada, Samera expected that she would encounter some barriers in continuing along this educational and career path, but she believed that she would be able to overcome these and build on her achievements if she worked hard.

These expectations were based on anecdotal information about Canada that was available to those who were considering migrating to another country. Samera has now been in Canada for six years and things have not worked out as she had hoped. The first barrier was her level of competency in the English language. The Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) classes did not provide her with enough practice in speaking the language, and this is still an issue for her. Secondly, none of her education qualifications are recognized or accepted in Canada, because the situation in Afghanistan makes it difficult to have these verified. Samera has just about given up hope of being able to complete the arduous and expensive process of re-qualifying as a doctor in Canada. To her dismay, Samera found that even her high school certificate was not accepted so she had to enroll in high school courses. In her classes, she met students who were also Afghan immigrants but were much younger than her and she felt that they looked down on her: "....some people...the young generation, they were my classmates...sometimes they laughed...they said to me, 'Oh, doctor? You're in this class? You're doing upgrading?' ...really they didn't have any background back home. And now they are in [the] same class." Being in the same class as these young people was difficult enough without having to endure their comments, but these reactions also reinforced her determination to regain her sense of self related to her educational achievement.

When she arrived in Canada, Samera had two children and then she had one more child a year after they arrived. The needs of the family placed many demands on her time as well as on family resources. Samera's husband, who worked as a pharmacist in Afghanistan, has decided to opt for the onerous task of re-accreditation in Canada and has been studying long hours to prepare for the pharmacy credentialing exams as well as

working full time. Hence the bulk of child rearing and housework falls to Samera, making it difficult for her to make much progress.

Samera spent a long time describing her various activities and accomplishments as a doctor and it seemed that the process of narrating these stories was part of the attempt to hold onto this aspect of her identity in some way, and to have this identity acknowledged. Samera feels her 'doctor self' slipping away, leaving her feeling vulnerable and at the margins of her profession and her community. Samera professes not to care too much that she cannot practice as a doctor: "It doesn't matter if I'm not getting a doctor job. I did lots of doctor practice, four years.... I studied in medical school, I had my dream to have a certificate as a doctor...I helped lots of people." She states that her experiences of working as a doctor in the refugee camps fulfilled her dreams and that she can now move on to other things. But this aspect of her identity is clearly very difficult for Samera to renegotiate. She has trouble letting go of her identity as a doctor: "...all the time, when I face people and I think about myself, what I was and what I am now; nothing. I have to be *something*." Currently, Samera is struggling to find another career that is closely related to what she did before and feels that once she finds this, she can start to reclaim her identity and her place in society: "...If I can't be a doctor again...I have [to] study something related to my background to get a good job. When you have a good job, you have everything. You have respect, you have everything in your society."

All the women in this study saw educational achievement as being integral to having a strong sense of self and as being the key to their own and their families' futures. For Soraya and Aziza the task of choosing a career path was an easier one, since they left Afghanistan before they finished high school and had not started on a definite career

path. For Hasina and Samera, this was a more difficult decision since they had already embarked on a career path in Afghanistan or had received accreditation as well as work experience in their chosen field. Since it was not possible to continue on their original paths that had been interrupted, these women have had to redefine this aspect of their identity to a much greater degree, and have encountered many barriers.

Narrative Thread 2: Renegotiating Occupation and Career

The renegotiation of identity in terms of occupation and career and the challenge of working towards finding a suitable job have also had a profound impact on the women. For the women, a suitable job is one which matches their level of educational achievement, is interesting and challenging, maximizes their abilities and talents and also provides status and recognition in the family and community.

Soraya has found it relatively easy to renegotiate her identity related to her career and occupation. Although she had envisioned herself as a doctor when she was in high school, she was aware of the barriers that she would face if she tried to continue along this path and she chose a new career path. Soraya is enjoying the field she has chosen and continues to pursue opportunities to improve her credentials so that she can maximize her future job prospects. As with educational achievement, the age at which Soraya came to Canada seems to have facilitated the renegotiation of this aspect of her identity.

When Aziza left Afghanistan, she was only sixteen and had not yet formulated any plans for her future career. Her mother would have liked her to become a doctor, but Aziza laughingly dismisses this idea as being one that many Afghan parents have for their children. Besides, she knew that trying to enter medical school would be almost impossible for her. After Aziza arrived in Canada and completed her high school

education, she was able to choose a career that met her interests, talents and abilities and also provided her with good job prospects. Aziza feels that "… if you love your career, you know you can make it. Now I'm happy, because this is what I want to be. It's interesting and I love it. … I just love working with numbers. I don't get bored." Aziza faced many barriers through the process of learning English and getting through her high school and post-secondary program but in spite of this, Aziza continues to build on her career path and is determined to achieve good credentials in the field. Although she feels that her English still needs improvement, she is committed to taking more language courses to keep improving her language skills so that they do not pose a barrier to her in her future jobs.

At the time of this study, Hasina, who had started on the path towards a journalism career in Afghanistan, has completed her office administration diploma program and is now seeking permanent, fulltime employment, but this has been a frustrating process for her. She is anxious to find a stable position and describes how she thinks her life would be different if she had a full-time job:

> I think if I get a job, it might help me now. I think I will be in the right direction…I [would be] going full time to a job every day from 8 to 4 and then come home, so now I know my schedule …… I am making money, I don't have to worry about this. …I feel that maybe because of [not having a] job, I feel that maybe I am lost. I was thinking after finishing school, I would find a job, …. and I will be a very happy person by that time, and I would take some courses like dance course and exercise course, and after a while I will buy a small car for myself …… but doesn't work that way for me.

Hasina attributes her difficulty in finding a job to a lack of motivation and blames herself for not doing the right things. The stress associated with finding a permanent job has also worsened her already strained family relationships, especially with her mother and her older sister. Hasina relates her difficulties in finding a job to a loss of self-confidence. She feels that she has gone from being capable, confident and able to make decisions about her life to being very unsure of herself, and expresses this loss of self-confidence:

> Once you lose this thing [confidence], slowly you put down yourself and somebody else says something to you and that makes you, puts you down too, you know…I feel that still I depend on them [family], I am not independent, I cannot decide on my own what I want in my life. Like somewhere I am really lost right now.

Hasina still regrets her decision not to pursue a career in journalism. She now feels that if she had put some more effort into this she would have been able to continue along this career path, but at that time the requirements of the program seemed too huge a hurdle to overcome.

Samera is also struggling with renegotiating her identity related to her career. Of the four women in the study, she had invested the most time, effort and resources in her career, so the transition from Afghanistan to Canada with respect to her career has been a difficult one. The four years that Samera spent working as doctor in the refugee camps firmly established her identity as a doctor. She was one of the few Afghan doctors in the camps and was very much in demand because of the need for her skills, her empathy for her patients and her commitment to being the best doctor that she could under the

circumstances. During the difficult birth of her first child, Samera had received very poor care in the hospital she was in and she had told herself that she would never practice medicine unless she could treat her patients in the best possible manner.

> I saw lots of doctors, …they are working for money, …they don't care about people. …They didn't do hard work like me. … they did, forty people, forty patients. I did double and more than that, one hundred, more than hundred. But I have less pay than them. But I would not care about that. The only thing I thought: "…I am a doctor. I have a doctor's job."

A senior doctor at the hospital in Pakistan had said to Samera: "Nobody can help better than you. We can hire some other doctors, three, four of them, but the job you're doing, nobody can do it, because [with you there] we don't need translators." Samera threw herself into her work, and even though she had two children by then, she rarely mentioned her children in our conversations. Her sister-in law looked after the children in Pakistan, and since Samera worked very long hours, she was not able to spend much time with them. Her subject position related to her work seemed to take priority over her position as a wife and mother during this period in her life. We also see here a here a contradiction in Samera's subject positions. On the one hand, her identity as a doctor is strongly tied to her need to help other women, but on the other hand, the desire to help women have more children reproduces the inequities that women face in the form of expectations of having many children, and at least some of to be male.

Samera speaks evocatively of her struggle to maintain her identity as a doctor. When she first arrived in Canada, other Afghan immigrants would call her "doctor sahib" (sahib being a title of respect) since many of them had been in the same refugee camps

that she was in or had heard about her. However, she found that as time went by and people saw that she was not working as a doctor in Canada, she felt that their attitudes towards her started to change. They did not have the same respect for her and even seemed to be looking down on her. Her educational and professional achievements did not provide her the central position they once did. Samera feels that she cannot blame them for their change in attitude because she is no longer what she used be to be: "Yeah, they're right, I'm nothing right now, …I'm not doctor right now, I don't have any patients." But at the same time she talks longingly of her previous position of respect within her community: "Still, I know, in Afghanistan, some of my friends or far relatives, when they call me, they tell me, 'Still people, they [are] talking about you.' "

As with educational achievement, the process of finding a desirable job has been an easier task for Soraya and Aziza who arrived in Canada as adolescents because of the continuity in the process of completing their education and finding employment. Both women have chosen a career path, have achieved some level of recognition in their fields and are building on this achievement by furthering their education. Although they have encountered barriers along the way, the women have found jobs which they feel are a good fit for their career aspirations and are relatively happy with this aspect of their lives. In contrast, the women who came to Canada in their twenties, Hasina and Samera, have encountered a greater degree of interruption in their lives making it more difficult to pick up the threads of education and career. They are both still encountering many challenges in the process of renegotiating this aspect of their identities.

Narrative Thread 3: Renegotiating Family Relationships

The third aspect of identity through which the women define themselves is their position in and relationship with their families. The closest relationships through the process of migration have been with immediate families, but also with extended families and the community with which they have had the most contact. This is the community of Afghan families who have migrated to Canada and who share the same ethnic and religious background.

Soraya spoke about this connection and relationship with families, and the changes through migration:

> In Afghanistan, I think the people they are so friendly to each other. All relatives, they're so close to each other. Everyone. Sometimes we are not from the same, kind of, tribe… If you're one Afghan and one Ismaili, so they are so close to each other, all the time they can help each other and share whatever they have to each other.

She contrasts this with their current situation: "…here, everyone is so busy, and actually we do not see each other, except the weekend. … over there, we had close relatives, friends, cousins." Now, she says, families rarely have time to spend with each other because of the struggle to manage the multiple demands of life.

Soraya speaks regretfully of new immigrants who "don't want to be like an Afghan anymore." She sees "being Canadian" as being in direct opposition to "being Afghan" and even though she has renegotiated her subject positions related to family, education and career, she asserts the need for families to keep holding on to the values and identities that they held in Afghanistan. For Soraya, there is a link between the

closeness of family relationships and the ability to keep identities intact. Family relationships are not as close as they were in Afghanistan, and she feels that Canadian families are different: "…here the Canadian people…they don't have trust [in] each other as we do. But as I'm seeing that ours is getting more closer to them." She worries that families may blindly follow what they see as the norms around them: "like small kids; they follow whatever they see outside. That way I think they lose whatever they have, which is very important."

Hasina was the most expressive about her family relationships and these relationships have changed a great deal since their arrival in Canada. As other participants mentioned, in Afghanistan families spent a lot of time together and provided a sense of security and comfort even through the difficult war years. These strong relationships still existed when the family first arrived but they have become increasingly fragmented. Hasina describes these changes:

> The relationship was very close, we could listen to each other, we could talk, like respect each other and laugh. Whatever mum cooks everybody sits together and eats, breakfast lunch and supper….Now here it is different. Nobody is at home to eat together. It's a different life. …Now we don't talk to each other, we are at the same house, no talking.

Hasina always had a close relationship with her father because she had worked with him in his store as she grew up. She grew up feeling that she was his favourite and the center of his attention, giving her a sense of security and confidence about her place in the family. Now Hasina's father is depressed and isolated because he has no work and

he sits on the couch for most of the day and hardly speaks, even to her. Hasina finds it difficult to witness the changes in her father but feels helpless about this situation.

> From the childhood I was the one who is working with him and I was his daughter, and all the time, like, the only person that he was listening, he was loving, like everything was me....the favourite girl, always.
>
> [Now] Dad is just sitting on the couch, he doesn't like to talk, he doesn't like to watch TV, he doesn't like to read that much, so it's like a depression for him. ... when I see him, I get upset and I get sad and I feel bad that I cannot do anything. So this is one part of it...that hurts me, that I cannot do anything because of the language.

Hasina's relationships with other family members have also changed. She has lost the sense of being respected and valued in her family and has moved from a feeling of being in the centre of her tight-knit family to being on the margins of a family whose members have lost their sense of being connected to each other through the period of settlement. Hasina struggles with the tension of wanting to stay attached to her family and yet carve out an independent and autonomous life for herself. Although she expresses regret at not being able to make decisions for herself without input from her family, she also emphatically states that she would not choose to live on her own. Her attachment to her family, in spite of all their difficulties also helps her to cope with change, and she cannot imagine a life apart from them:

> ...back home we never separated from each other and even here we don't even think about getting separated or live by yourself and things like that, no....I

cannot live without them, I would miss them. Even we don't respect that much each other, but I cannot live without them.

In the renegotiation of family relationships, I again saw differences between Soraya and Aziza who left Afghanistan in their teens and Hasina and Samera who left in their twenties. The women who left Afghanistan in their teens have in a sense become adults in Canada, and the process of changing relationships through this phase in some ways probably reflects the changes that would have occurred had they grown up in Afghanistan. The two women who left Afghanistan in their twenties had already more clearly defined roles and relationships with their families and communities, and the myriad changes they have experienced through migration have caused shifts in these relationships that have been very difficult for them to negotiate. Samera, for example, struggles with the tension between being a caregiver and spending the time and resources that would be required to re-qualify as a physician. All the women spoke about their ongoing struggles to balance individual goals and aspirations with family needs, but the younger women seemed to be able to negotiate these with greater ease.

The women all spoke about negotiating different aspects of their identity within the context of their relationships, and how strong ties to their families and communities is a way of maintaining a sense of stability in those identities. They did not see the need to separate or differentiate themselves from their families and communities to a great degree, and many decisions about careers and jobs were made within the context of the family.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of the study through themes that emerged from my analysis of the women's stories. I sought to understand which aspects of the women's identities were most salient in their journey of migration. Three aspects of their identity emerged as being most important, and I presented these as three narrative threads. In the next chapter, I explore the strategies the women employed to renegotiate these aspects of their identities and the challenges they faced in the process.

CHAPTER 6:

THE LIMINAL SPACES OF MIGRATION

In the previous chapter, I presented three narrative threads representing the most significant aspects of identity that participants renegotiated through the process of migration and settlement. In this chapter, I take a closer look at facets of this complex and layered process of renegotiation and the factors that enabled as well as constrained the process. This discussion is framed within the postcolonial theoretical concept of a liminal space as an in-between space of potentiality in which diasporic migrants can generate new identities and perspectives. My findings support this conceptualization, but they also suggest that the structural and systemic constraints faced by the women during the settlement process make the space of identity renegotiation a bounded liminal space.

Facets of Identity Renegotiation

The process of renegotiating identities through migration can be a complex one with many different facets. Some existing subject positions are kept or preserved and others are either replaced or resisted and renegotiated. The women in this study described the empowering aspects of the process, those aspects of identity renegotiation that enabled them to acquire fresh perspectives and access new opportunities. However, the women also spoke about the profound sense of disjunction and dissonance they experienced. The experiences of change and flux began well before migration because of the unstable nature of their lives in Afghanistan. When the women reminisce about the "good life" they had, they are in fact looking back to a period some years before migration when their lives were relatively stable. The interruptions in their lives,

therefore, span a considerable period of time. However, the research questions of this study focus on the women's migration experiences and my discussion of the findings highlight this period in their lives.

The experiences of migration described by the women fit well with the description of an in-between or liminal space as theorized by Homi Bhabha (1990; 1994) and Gloria Anzaldua (1999). These authors describe the liminal space as open and ongoing spaces in which new identities can be constituted, leading to a renewed sense of agency. However, liminal spaces can also be transitory spaces that are full of ruptures and discontinuities and rife with tensions and contradictions.

The process of renegotiation within the liminal space and the resulting shifts in identities are not uni-directional processes with a beginning and an end but involve a back and forth movement in which identities "are never complete and are being continuously made and remade" (Anthias, 2001, p. 625). As we see in the women's lives, this movement continues over a considerable period of time. The women's identities have shifted considerably throughout the years of settlement. Even though they arrived in Canada a number of years ago, the women still struggle with many of the same constraints that faced them when they first arrived. Irving & Young (2004) indicate that liminal spaces, rather then being spatially or temporally bound, are open and ongoing, suggesting a state of "perpetual liminality" (p. 213). Although the open and constantly changing nature of this space enhances opportunities for movement, it also prolongs the period of flux and instability.

One characteristic of a liminal space is its capacity to bring about new perspectives, to move away from previous frameworks and to be able to see the self and

others through a new lens. All the women provided examples of the ways in which they came to terms with perspectives introduced by those who had a different set of values, beliefs and everyday practices. It seems that the movement to a newly renegotiated subject position facilitates, or perhaps necessitates the adoption of these new perspectives. Anzaldua (1990) suggests that the liminal space brings a realization of the need to recognize and acknowledge those who are different from us through an openness generated by "leaving the permanent boundaries of a fixed self ...and seeing through the eyes of the other" (p. 145).

Although being in the liminal space "links us to other ideas, people, and worlds," it can also create an uncomfortable state in which "we feel threatened by these new connections and the change they engender" (Anzaldua, 2002, p. 1). One way that the women respond to the ruptures inherent in the liminal space is to try to find the balance between, on the one hand, holding on to previously held subject positions that provide an anchor and a sense of connection to their past lives and, on the other, renegotiating some of these subject positions to ease the tasks of settlement. Although the women see the many opportunities available to them when new subject positions are taken up, they worry that the anchor provided by the positions they give up will be lost and that new perspectives will be unconsciously adopted or forced on them in some way. Hall (1996a) suggests that this fear of losing identities comes from the need for a "stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change" (p. 3). Although the women clearly see the need to renegotiate many of their subject positions, these shifts nonetheless leave the women with a sense of displacement

and loss, demonstrating that tensions and contradictions are another facet of the liminal space.

Enablers and Constraints in the Liminal Space

Each of the women in the study found different ways to renegotiate the important aspects of their identity. The women spoke about the many constraints they encountered in their journeys, but they also spoke about the things that enabled this process. The three key enablers include (1) strong family ties and relationships (2) a value for and commitment to educational achievement and (3) the women's faith and religious beliefs. The three significant constraints include (1) an interrupted life course (2) language barriers and (3) having to respond to multiple demands during the period of settlement in Canada.

The enablers of identity renegotiation can be seen as generative aspects of the liminal space since they support women in their efforts to actively engage with and respond to the tensions that arise from the process of renegotiation. These enablers provided them with a sense of hope and helped the women attain some of the expectations they had of crafting new kinds of lives for themselves in Canada. The constraints, on the other hand, severely curtailed the women's ability to renegotiate their multiple identities. The three constraints are largely a result of social, economic and cultural factors that affect both the pre-migration and the post-migration contexts. In the next section, I discuss each of these enablers and constraints.

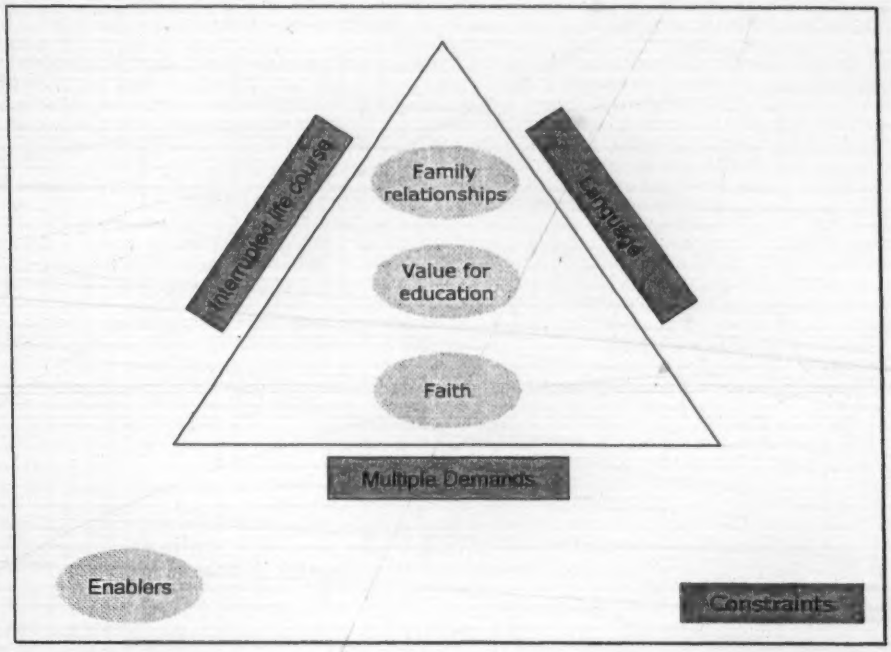

Figure 2: Enablers and Constraints in the Liminal Spaces of Identity Renegotiation

Strong Family Ties and Relationships

Maintaining strong family ties and relationships, despite all their concomitant tensions and responsibilities, helps the women to respond to constraints in their environment as well as work through other subject positions. From their families, they receive both emotional and material support in building on their educational achievement and careers, since being successful in these pursuits is seen both by the women and their families as being essential to the process of settlement in Canada, to a stable future and to a good quality of life. Families also provide a sense of belonging to counter the loneliness and isolation that many new immigrants face. The differences and contradictions between old and new norms, lifestyles, values and beliefs are brought into focus when new perspectives are encountered, creating ambiguity and tension and the need to resolve this

tension in some way. The work of negotiating these tensions occurs not just at an individual level but within the context of families and communities.

Delgado Bernal (2001), in her description of how Chicana women negotiate the barriers to academic achievement, suggests that the experience of "standing at the crossroads [of two cultures] can be challenging, exhausting and sometimes isolating" (p. 123) but the family is a source of strength and a way of anchoring some aspects of the self and renegotiating others. Families provide strategies for working through these tensions, and Delgado Bernal calls these "pedagogies of the home" (p. 623). In a similar vein, Villenas (2006) describes the teaching and learning that occurs between Chicana mothers and daughters not only as pedagogical moments which enable both the transmission of long accepted values and beliefs, but also as a way to "transform these meanings and embody a teaching and learning of self-worth and self-power" (p. 152).

Value for and Commitment to Educational Achievement

The value for and commitment to formal educational achievement played a significant role in the production of new and renegotiated subject positions. The women came to Canada anticipating challenges but also better opportunities and an easier life for the next generation. The promise of unlimited educational opportunities in Canada did not materialize to the degree the women had expected, making the production of educational subjectivities an ongoing "site for struggle" (Weedon, 1997, p. 36).

The women's aspirations in the area of formal education have been directly impacted by the historical and social contexts in which they attended primary and secondary school. All of the women completed at least some years of schooling during the Soviet (or Soviet influenced) rule, when policies that supported educational and work

opportunities for women were actively promoted. Although these policies met with resistance from some segments of the population, they had a substantial impact on the creation of material opportunities for women, as well as the new possibilities that women could imagine for themselves.

Nesbit (2005) suggests that a class analysis can help to clarify "the ideologies that frame our world; and the ways we experience, understand, and shape the world" (p. 8). The women's educational aspirations had also been reinforced by the class structures and socio-economic positions that provided the women certain kinds of social, cultural and economic capital. All the women came from backgrounds where family earnings and societal positions provided stable and comfortable lifestyles and gave them access to networks that facilitated their entry into education and work spheres. In Afghanistan, Samera had entered and completed a post-secondary education program and had chosen a desired career that had status and prestige within her family and community. Hasina had envisioned a journalist's life for herself, and the two younger women, Soraya and Aziza, had also imagined similar educational and career trajectories. These expectations set the stage for the ongoing renegotiation of educational identities after the women's migration to Canada.

In Canada the struggles for educational achievement were intertwined with family expectations as well as support. All the women in this study spoke about the ways in which their families supported their efforts in this area. In a study that focuses on the experiences of Chicana college students, Delgado Bernal (2001) describes how women draw on the cultural knowledge acquired from their homes and communities through legends, stories and behaviour to respond to and navigate barriers in educational activities

and to renegotiate their identities. Aziza describes how the support and encouragement of her family, especially her mother, played a large role in the development of her educational aspirations: "My mom, she wasn't educated but she [was] always encouraging us to study, to be something, be your own, don't depend on somebody else." Aziza attributes her family's support to their value for learning as well as the desire to provide for their children the kinds of educational opportunities her parents could not access.

One of the goals of a study that examined the higher education experiences of South Asian Muslim women in Britain was to problematize previously held conceptions of educated Muslim women as being able to attain educational achievement only by rejecting existing cultural practices, values and gendered roles within the family and community (Ahmad, 2001). The results of the study, in fact, indicated that many Muslim parents who attach a great deal of importance to maintaining existing religious and cultural values also actively encourage their daughters to pursue an education, for a variety of reasons. The pursuit of education is "an indicator of status and social mobility" (p. 144), a way to "attain and maintain social status and prestige within their social circles" (p. 145), a means of acquiring a level of financial independence in case of the loss of family and other networks, "to attract suitors of a similar status or above" (p. 145) and finally, part of a "family ethos" of the value of being an educated person. Educational achievement, therefore, was not found to be in opposition to the maintenance of traditional values, but existed alongside. The finding of Ahmad's study resonates with many of the reasons that the women in this study pursued higher levels of education in their quest to "be someone."

Faith and Religious Belief

Hasina and Samera spoke about the ways in which their faith and religious belief and an attempt to see the positive side of things helped them through the struggles of migration and settlement. During the difficult times of war in Afghanistan and through the process of migration, first to Pakistan and then to Canada, the women had the sense that they escaped major loss and trauma because there was a higher power looking over them. Faith in Islamic religious beliefs and maintaining a sense of hope is one of the strategies used by a group of Afghan refugees in Australia for the maintenance of health and well-being (Omeri, Lennings & Raymon, 2006). Other strategies that the authors perceived in their study included creating social and familial networks, preserving identity related to a profession and accessing support services when required.

Through the difficult and sometimes traumatic periods of migration and settlement, the women's faith and beliefs helped them to avoid becoming completely despondent about their situations, to maintain a sense of hope that their lives would improve and that eventually things would work out.

An Interrupted Life Course

The women in the study experienced long and significant interruptions in their life courses, both in Afghanistan and through the period of migration and settlement in Canada. The conditions of war and unrest in Afghanistan made it difficult for them to pursue activities and occupations within expected timeframes. The interruptions intensified in Pakistan when they were waiting, initially to return to Afghanistan and then eventually to migrate to another country. The challenges and difficulties of settlement in Canada amplified these interruptions.

All the women's lives would likely have progressed along a different path had they still been living in Afghanistan but these changes and interruptions have had more of an impact on the lives of the women who left Afghanistan when they were a bit older. For the two younger women who left Afghanistan when they were sixteen, Soraya and Aziza, the initial challenge was to finish their high school education in Canada. Even though they completed high school much later than they would have in Afghanistan, they were more easily able to move on to selecting and following a career path. They saw the move as opening up new opportunities and a way of escaping the expectations of being married by their late teens and having children in their early twenties. For the women who came to Canada in their twenties, Hasina and Samera, the interruption has been more traumatic, since they had already made some decisions about their life course and were each pursuing an educational and career path. These paths were interrupted to a much greater degree and the women have not been able to pick up the dropped threads of their old lives and to continue their lives in a satisfying way. The impact of an interrupted life course has been exacerbated by the many systemic barriers that the women have encountered in their education and career paths, as well as the inadequacy of funding and services that specifically meet their needs.

Language

Competency in the English language has been a major barrier for all the women since they came to Canada, profoundly affecting all aspects of their lives and their ability to renegotiate identities. As Rushdie (2002) states "anyone who has crossed a language frontier will readily understand that such a journey involves a form of shape-shifting or self-translation. The change of language changes us" (p. 374). Weedon (1997) highlights

the role of language in the formation of identities: "Language is the place…where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed…Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific" (p. 21). Moreover, English language proficiency for new immigrants is form of cultural and social capital that affects the renegotiation of women's subject positions in definitive ways.

For example, for the women in this study, language proficiency has determined the kinds of jobs they could get, the speed at which they completed high school courses, the programs they could gain admittance to, their ability to function in society to get things done and their sense of being competent at whatever they undertook. Aziza attributes her difficulties with language to the early interruption in her education: "… I didn't know my language properly because I was young when I came from Afghanistan. If you don't know your own language, how to write properly, how [are] you going to learn [a] new language?" As research as shown, the learning of a second language depends on a number of factors including how well a person has mastered a first language as well as the age at which the learning of the second language begins (Hou & Beiser, 2006). The opportunities to participate in language classes and the incentives for learning the language are other factors that contribute to learning outcomes. Language proficiency also plays a key role in accessing economic opportunities and social resources, in facilitating participation in the power structures of the new society and in ensuring the general well-being of a newcomer. Additionally, when examining the links between language fluency and employability, Hou and Beiser found that language proficiency does not affect employability as much early in the settlement period, perhaps

because most new immigrants are working in jobs requiring low skill levels. However, for immigrants who have been here for about ten years, language proficiency becomes a contributor to employability.

The women in the study all spoke about the inadequacy of their ESL classes to meet their needs. Soraya found that the placement test for the classes was not accurate and she ended up being bored in the level she was placed in. Aziza was so busy earning a living when she first arrived that she could only attend the classes sporadically, since her work schedules prevented her from attending the classes regularly. Samera had issues with child care which also prevented her from attending classes. Both Aziza and Hasina spoke about the inadequacy of the ESL classes in improving their writing skills. According to Hou and Beiser (2006), ESL classes for new immigrants are often ineffective because many new immigrants only attend these classes on a part-time basis and often only for the first six months after they arrive. In a study designed to explore the teaching of writing in LINC classes, Cray and Currie (2004) found that ESL teachers did not feel that writing was an important skill for new immigrants and tended to focus on their listening and speaking skills. The exit criteria for LINC classes only requires learners to be able to reproduce or write short and simple pieces of work, and the resulting skill level is inadequate for those learners who want to apply for and pursue a post-secondary program. Other issues that learners in these classes have cited are ineffective materials and teaching methods, inappropriate grouping of students within classes and large class sizes.

Although all the women recognized the need for proficiency in the English language as being vital to the settlement process and worked hard to gain this

proficiency, inadequacies in ESL programs, funding and services prevented them from rapidly gaining this proficiency. A language barrier impacted the ways in which the women renegotiated many aspects of their identities related to education and career, and thus affected their family relationships. The new opportunities available to the women in Canada have been severely curtailed by their difficulties with language, demonstrating how the language barrier has acted as a significant constraint to the generative aspect of the liminal space.

Responding to Multiple Demands

The third major constraint that the women encountered is the struggle of responding to multiple demands upon arriving in Canada. In addition to coping with initial settlement issues and with the language, women also have to contend with the challenges of recognition of qualifications and accreditation and with finding suitable employment.

The difficulties that immigrant women have in finding employment have been well documented in the literature (VanderPlaat, 2007). Man (2004) argues that in spite of the Canadian government's rhetoric since the 1960s of valuing the skills of new immigrants, educated and skilled immigrants, and in particular immigrant women, have encountered a number of barriers. These include the non-recognition of qualifications, restrictive accreditation policies, the requirement for Canadian experience and other forms of labour market discrimination. Mojab (1999) refers to this as a process of de-skilling in which the education, skills and knowledge acquired in their countries of origin are undervalued, resulting in unemployment or underemployment. Tastsoglou and Preston (2005) in an analysis of 2001 census data found that immigrant women,

especially those with high school or post-secondary education, were more likely to be unemployed than Canadian-born women, suggesting that education does not necessarily positively impact employment for all women.

Samera's qualifications as a physician and her extensive experience working in refugee camps had little impact on her ability to continue along her desired career path in Canada. Although she had anticipated needing some level of re-qualification to meet Canadian standards, she had never anticipated the extent to which her education and experience would be ignored and invalidated in Canada. Samera's experience of not having her qualifications recognized reflects those of many professional immigrants who are faced with the expensive and time consuming tasks of re-accreditation, exacerbated by the lack of information about the process of accreditation, the difficult language in which available information is couched and bureaucratic application processes (Man, 2004). Immigrants who have qualified as physicians in their home countries face even more barriers than those in other professions. A survey of internationally trained physicians found that in addition to having to pass two levels of difficult licensing exams, International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are also faced with the challenge of finding residency positions in hospitals (Cave, 2000). In 2006, 932 IMGs in Canada applied for residency positions through the residency matching service but only 12% were successful because of the limited number of positions available (Canadian Medical Association, 2006). These barriers make it almost impossible for IMGs to work in Canada even though they may have high levels of education and experience.

Waters and Teo (2003) point to the causes for this deskilling as being "discrimination…enacted through a reaction to skin colour, accent, dress and demeanour,

apparently preventing the objective evaluation of technical and professional qualifications" (p. 35) as well as the stereotyping of groups based on cultural characteristics. As most of the women found, when they first arrived in Canada, the only jobs available to them were in sectors which employ new immigrants as "flexible and disposable labour, suited to the demands of the globalized economy" (Man, 2004, p. 137). These jobs are precarious and offer no security or benefits, but the exigencies of life as a new immigrant in Canada leave them with few options but to take these jobs.

New immigrants, however may ascribe their lack of success to individual deficits rather than structural issues such as racism and other forms of discrimination, resulting in a sense of disempowerment and a loss of agency (Gibb, Hamdon and Jamal, 2008). Hasina, for example, who had dreamt of becoming a journalist, saw her lack of success in securing a suitable job as being due to a lack of motivation and time management skills and her inability to successfully use the resources available to her. The women tend to attribute the barriers they encountered to personal shortcomings and limitations rather than to "socially produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women in similar social positions" (Weedon, 1997, p. 33).

Another demand that places an additional burden on many women is having to take on the role of the primary caregiver in their families even though they may be studying and working long hours. Samera and Hasina were both faced with responding to not only their individual challenges, but also of being the caregiver in the family for children or for elderly parents. Moreover, many educational environments and work situations do not provide support for women who are trying to manage multiple responsibilities. In addition, immigrant women who are family caregivers may experience

a number of barriers to accessing health and social services which include the cultural sensitivity of these services and language accessibility issues, making the task of care giving a more difficult one for newcomers to Canada (Stewart et al., 2006).

Liminal Spaces – Generative, but Bounded

The enablers of identity renegotiation presented in the previous section convey the many opportunities available to the women once they arrived in Canada. The women have responded to these opportunities with a sense of agency that demonstrates the generative possibilities of liminal spaces. In Afghanistan, the ongoing conditions of war and unrest as well as the policies that governed women's participation in education and work spheres would have circumscribed their participation in these spheres. In Canada, however, the women could aspire to achieve higher levels of education and could envision and pursue new career options. Although education is valued in their families, the level of formal education most of them would have been able to achieve in Afghanistan would have been prescribed and limited by expectations of marrying and having children at an early age. The options for long-term careers may have been limited. Family relationships would also have been based on relatively fixed gendered roles and expectations of the positionality of women within family and community contexts. In Canada, women have taken on the roles of providing financial and other forms of support to their families to a much greater degree than they might have in Afghanistan, leading to an increased sense of their own capabilities. Shifts in family relationships and the process of having to renegotiate these, difficult as they have been, enabled them to consider diverse perspectives and different ways of being in the world and of relating to others. These shifts have not just occurred for the women but are accompanied by shifts within

their families. The families are much more accepting and encouraging of the women's desire for formal education than they would have been in Afghanistan, for careers that meet their dreams and aspirations and of their need to make decisions in these and other areas for themselves.

Many of the needs of new immigrants can be met by providing timely and suitable services that ease the tasks of settlement for both individuals and families. Although the women in the study acknowledged the help that they received when they first arrived, they also spoke extensively about unfair policies and practices that prevented them from gaining access to opportunities they had been led to believe would be available to them in Canada. These barriers limit the women's sense of agency and prevent them from realizing the high expectations they had of life in Canada.

Weedon (1997) suggests that in each context, there are a multiplicity of subject positions available to individuals, but the specific positions they choose to take up and the ways in which they take these up are "governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society" (p. 91). The conceptualization of the liminal space may have a "universalizing tendency" (Loomba, 2005, p. 150) that ignores the ways in which subjectivities are fashioned by gender and class, as well as by specific contexts. Moreover, as Anthias (2001) suggests, hybridity does not always result in unhindered empowerment. The agency that women gain within the liminal space is not unencumbered but is "exercised within a system of social constraints, linked to the positionality of actors (both individual and collective) with specific social contexts" (p. 629). Anthias suggests that these contexts produce social identities that are contingent on

unequal allocations of economic resources and also of the allocation of power, authority and legitimacy in political, social and cultural contexts.

For the women in this study, the limits to the liminal come in the form of multiple demands of the settlement process. Women have to cope with a loss of familial and communal networks, unfamiliarity with new social and cultural contexts and finding a balance between individual aspirations and family needs. In addition, the women face a number of structural and systemic barriers, many of which are racialized and gendered. These include difficulties in accessing appropriate English language programs, inadequate settlement services, discrimination in recognition of credentials and work experience and difficulties in finding well-paid and suitable employment. These multiple constraints interconnect in complex ways to position the women at the social and economic margins of Canadian society.

An analysis of the findings of this study leads me to suggest that the liminal spaces of migration in which identities are renegotiated are contested and contradictory spaces which exemplify "the tension between limitation and possibility" (Handa, 2003, p. 11) of liminality. These spaces have been theorized as facilitating a renewed sense of agency, and although the findings of this study corroborate these characteristics of the liminal space, they also demonstrate that the structural constraints that the women encounter during the process of migration constrain and disable their agency, and make it a bounded liminal space.

Chapter Summary

Migrating to a new country can be a difficult and stressful experience that requires support at many levels. The findings of this study indicate that the barriers of

language, an interrupted life course and having to respond to the multiple demands of settlement without adequate support, disrupted and constrained the advantages provided by the enablers of identity renegotiation. These constraints affected the strategies the women used to renegotiate the important aspects of identity through the process of migration.

The spaces of identity renegotiation can be conceptualized as being an instance of a liminal space, as conceived by post-colonial theorists. Liminal spaces have been posited as spaces that are full of potential for the creation of an empowered sense of self, and enablers of new perspectives and ways of being in the world. The findings of this study support the description of liminal spaces as being empowering and generating a new sense of agency. However, barriers in the form of systemic and structural inequities limit and constrain the sense of agency. For the women in this study, these barriers make the liminal space of identity renegotiation during migration and settlement a bounded space.

CHAPTER 7:

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I offer concluding thoughts about the implications of this research and some recommendations for policy and practice. I start with some introductory remarks about this study followed by a discussion of the links between identity renegotiation and the learning that occurs throughout migration as well as the sites in which this learning occurs. In the last section, I provide some recommendations for policy and practice in the areas of settlement services and language acquisition programs for immigrants, and finally, some suggestions for future work.

Research Objectives

The motivation for this study arose from my involvement in programs for women who had recently arrived from Afghanistan and from my conversations with them about their settlement experiences, their excitement and sense of hope about the new opportunities available to them in Canada, as well as the barriers and challenges they faced. Women in these programs spoke about how these experiences affected their sense of self, their relationships with their families and communities, and their positions in the new society. The sense of dislocation they felt even after a few years of being in Canada echoed some of my experiences of migrating to Canada many years ago and prompted questions about how the process of settlement affects "who we are and what we can be" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 3) as well as the learning that occurs during these shifts. Although I share a faith community with these women, there is a great deal of difference in our histories and backgrounds as well as the circumstance in which we left our

countries of origin and the situations in which we arrived. As an adult educator, I was interested in how the women's backgrounds and experiences impacted the ways in which they engaged in formal education programs, some of which I was responsible for designing.

The conversations with the Afghan women I had met and my own musings and reflections gave rise to the research question of this study, which centred on the relationship between the migration experiences of Afghan women in Canada and their processes of identity renegotiation. To contextualize this question, I sought to understand the women's pre-migration and post-migration experiences, how the women renegotiated their sense of identity in Canada and the constraints and enablers of that renegotiation. I hoped that the responses to these questions would shed some light on the identities of Afghan migrant women and how their multiple subject positions are bound up in the process of migration, identity renegotiation and learning. These insights could then be used as a basis for contributing to the literature on the policies and practices of adult education programs for immigrant women.

Identity Renegotiation and Learning

Multiple Identities at Formal Learning Sites

The process of identity renegotiation involves learning and relearning about multiple selves, the selves in relation to others and in relation to the world. For the women in this study, much of the learning related to renegotiation of identities occurred with respect to education, career and family, the three aspects of their identity that emerged as being most salient during migration and settlement. The women had to learn

to navigate their way through complex pathways of education and career within the context of their families, and at the same time learn how to respond to the barriers and challenges they encountered.

The sites of formal learning that women participated in included language classes, job search and employment training workshops and community colleges for high school upgrading and post-secondary programs. These sites, however, often ignore women's multiple roles and subject positions and the tensions involved in negotiating these positions. For example, Samera had trouble finding suitable language classes because of child care issues. Aziza would have liked to find flexible postsecondary programs that would allow her to progress at her own rate, since attending a full-time program was not financially viable for her. Some financial support to attend a post-secondary program would also have reduced the need for her to work long hours to support herself and her family. These issues related to multiple demands often forced the women to choose one aspect of their identity to focus on at the expense of another. Samera had to postpone trying to re-qualify as a physician because of the cost of the required courses, as well as the amount of time it would take away from her young children. Hasina cited the example of having to spend so much time on a part-time job and her education that she had little or no time for her family. For new migrants, the priority of meeting basic individual and family needs circumscribed the women's rate of progress in their formal education paths, and added to the tension of negotiating between short-term needs and longer term educational goals.

Formal sites for learning need to attend to the multiplicity of selves that migrants bring to a learning environment. Programs at these sites, however, often seem to be

designed with the assumption that the specific task of learning being addressed in the program is the only task at hand, without a consideration of the many different aspects of identity that migrant women have to simultaneously attend to and renegotiate. Clark (1999) makes the case that theories of learning and practices of adult education that move away from the notion of a static and unitary self to notions of a multiplicity of selves that are always in flux, hold more promise for the practice of adult education. Taking multiple selves into account could offer "a more complex understanding of the interplay of personal agency and the colonizing power of particular sociocultural forces" (p. 45) and could provide a way of understanding the tensions that learners have to contend with when participating in formal education programs.

Alternate Sites of Learning

Learning to renegotiate identities occurs in a variety of formal, non-formal and informal settings and within the context of relationships with families and communities. Although research on education and learning for new immigrants often focuses on sites of formal and informal learning such as schools, colleges and other institutions that provide programs for new migrants, the findings of this study suggest that a crucial site of learning is the family and the community.

Gouthro (2005) suggests that the 'homeplace,' the space in which homes and communities are grounded, is an important site for learning but its significance, especially in the lives of women, is often ignored. The homeplace plays a crucial role in the formation of identities and provides opportunities for negotiating values and beliefs. It can also provide a safe space away from the reach of oppressive systems or a site from which resistance to these structures can be enacted.

The enablers of identity renegotiation that emerged through the analysis of women's narratives in this study were strong family ties and relationships, a commitment to educational achievement and faith and religious beliefs. These enablers, cultivated and nurtured through close relationships, provided women with strategies for overcoming and working through the barriers that they encountered during settlement.

The recent work and literature in the area of Chicana feminist pedagogy offers some interesting parallels and insights. In a study that employed a Chicana feminist pedagogical framework, Delgado Bernal (2001) explored the tools and strategies that are learned in the home and are employed by Chicana women to confront the disempowering barriers they face to their educational and academic achievement. These "pedagogies of the home" are a form of cultural knowledge and form the basis of resistance to the multiple oppressions women face, in the shape of racism, sexism and classism in higher educational institutions. In her analysis, Delgado Bernal suggests that the women's mestiza consciousness, "an identity that is fluid, resilient and oppositional" (p. 635) draws upon their cultural assets of bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities and spiritualities to interrupt and resist dominant perceptions and ideologies. Biculturalism, or living in the in-between spaces of two cultures, allows women to see broader perspectives and provides new insights not always available to others.

Families and communities are better able to recognize and address the multiple selves that women have to renegotiate and to use these identities as a generative force rather than a limiting aspect of women's lives. The women in this study were able to respond to the barriers they faced in their educational journeys with ongoing support

from their families and communities, and through their religious beliefs and spiritual practices. Families, communities and a strong sense of spirituality provided a source of inspiration and motivation, and as well as tools and strategies for manoeuvring through the everyday barriers encountered within educational institutions. A broader conceptualization of the sites for learning which includes the 'homeplace' and 'pedagogies of the home' offers a way to further explore and expand our notions of the relationship between multiple identities and learning.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The experiences of the women in this study suggest several areas in which policies and practices could be adjusted to better meet their needs, and perhaps the needs of other newcomers to Canada. These areas emerged from the findings and include an interrupted life course, responding to the multiple demands of settlement, and language issues. Although the settlement services and language classes available to the women assisted them in addressing these constraints to some extent, the women also spoke about the shortcomings and inadequacies of these services and programs. In this section I will address some of these issues.

Settlement Services

Most new migrants have access to and utilize some settlement services when they first arrive, and these can be valuable in providing support for the initial tasks of settlement. However, the findings of this study highlight two issues regarding the provision of these services. First, the migration experiences of the participants of this study were greatly influenced by the social, political and economic conditions in

Afghanistan and Pakistan prior to migration. The long years of war and instability interrupted their lives significantly and affected their subsequent settlement experiences in Canada. However, the settlement and support services available to the women did not seem to acknowledge these backgrounds and experiences. For example, producing proof of qualifications and credentials is extremely difficult because of the inaccessibility of documentation from educational institutions in Afghanistan given the ongoing conditions of political instability in the country. The educational institutions the women wanted to attend in Canada often did not recognize these limitations and provided few alternative options for assessment of equivalencies.

I recommend providing settlement workers with training and orientation programs that would contextualize the migration experiences of specific groups by including information about the social, political and economic conditions in their home countries. These programs could facilitate a better understanding of the histories and backgrounds of various groups of immigrants and would help to align services to the needs of these groups. Educational institutions could also make greater efforts to recognize the varying histories and backgrounds of applicants and to provide alternative methods of assessing educational qualifications.

The second issue with settlement services is the length of time that newcomers can access these services. Many settlement services are only available to newcomers in the first year or two after their arrival, but there are many settlement challenges that persist for another four to five years. Current settlement services seem to be effective in responding to initial needs such as interim funding, housing, schools, health care and language classes. Participants of this study reported that they were able to meet these

needs with the help of agencies as well as through networks of friends and family who were recent arrivals themselves. However, the tasks of settlement seemed to become more difficult after these immediate needs were met and as the women began to formulate longer term plans for themselves. These plans required receiving acknowledgment for existing educational achievement and professional credentials, planning for post-secondary education, obtaining information on career development and gaining suitable work experience in chosen fields. These are complex tasks for newcomers and there is little ongoing support available for gathering information, assessing it and following up with a plan. The women who had fewer demands on their time were able to navigate these more successfully, but responsibilities of looking after young children or elderly parents and the necessity of working long hours at low paying jobs precluded others' ability to navigate these pathways.

Thus, my second recommendation is to broaden the current definitions of settlement to include the longer term tasks of determining and following through with education and career goals, and of gaining work experience. Although there have been a number of initiatives in recent years to create bridging programs for internationally trained workers in professions such as accounting and engineering, these programs need to be extended into other fields. A more holistic model of settlement services would also help to attend to the many different roles and tasks that new immigrants have to navigate and to meet the long term needs of newcomers.

Language Proficiency Issues

The acquisition of English language emerged as a constraint that posed a major barrier in the renegotiation of identities related to education, work and families. The

women spoke at length about their challenges in this area and highlighted areas where programs could be adjusted to better meet their needs.

The women in this study arrived in Canada with varying levels of English proficiency. Three of the women had obtained paid and voluntary positions teaching English to younger Afghan refugee children while in Pakistan due to their higher language skill levels. These experiences led them to believe that language would not be much of a barrier when they arrived in Canada. Unfortunately, the women did not anticipate the difficulties they would encounter with accent, vocabulary, idiom, and colloquial uses of language. Moreover, most of their language experience was with conversational English and not with writing. This unanticipated difficulty of language learning posed a challenge that was not sufficiently addressed by the resources available to them.

The women's comments on language barriers point to several service gaps in ESL classes for immigrants and in the LINC system in particular. First, placement is often an issue as the women were often placed in inappropriate ESL levels and were then 'stuck' in these classes, slowing their rate of progress. This could be addressed by providing more appropriate and frequent testing for skill levels to ensure suitable placement.

Second, funding for ESL classes is only available for short periods of time after arrival in Canada, but for the women in this study, the need to attend to the conflicting demands of settlement extended the period of language learning. More flexible programs and funding that are suitable for learners with diverse needs would facilitate ongoing attendance in ESL classes and contribute to a more rapid rate of progress.

Third, there is a growing need for differentiated language programs for specific careers and professions, as well as for those intending to pursue higher education. The women in this study all wanted to pursue a post-secondary education but the language classes they attended placed little emphasis on written skills, preventing them from either gaining admittance to programs of their choice or from succeeding in areas of study that required these skills. Some institutions have begun to provide language programs that address the needs of specific groups such as doctors or engineers but these programs need to be more widely available and broadened to include other areas of expertise.

Finally, all the women felt that attending ESL classes did not provide them with sufficient opportunities to practice speaking skills. A recommendation to address this gap would be to include a practicum component in ESL classes involving placement at a job site, either for paid work, or in a volunteer capacity which could provide additional opportunities for improving conversational skills.

Suggestions for Future Work

The findings of this study reveal that learning related to the processes of identity renegotiation occurs in many different settings and through a variety of strategies. A valuable area of study would be an exploration of the specific experiences of groups of migrant women in different educational settings. These could include formal, nonformal and informal settings. Formal education programs could include language classes, employment preparation programs and well as post-secondary and higher education programs. The literature on immigrants and formal education programs seems to focus on basic and 'essential' skills such as language learning and literacy. However, many immigrants arriving in Canada have high levels of education and experience, but there is

a scarcity of literature on their educational experiences in high school, post-secondary and accreditation programs. Nonformal settings for learning include networks or support groups available through various agencies that provide services for immigrant women. Gibb, Hamdon & Jamal (2008) found that immigrant serving organizations can be productive sites for "reworking and rethinking identity, creating fugitive knowledge and resisting dominant discourses" (p. 13). Informal settings for learning could include the home and the community. These studies would need to consider the backgrounds, histories and circumstances of migration of specific groups of immigrants and relate these to their learning experiences in these programs. The results of these studies could add to the body of knowledge that links migration and learning.

Another useful area of study would be the link between language, learning and identity. The women in this study spoke about the immense challenges of learning a new language, one of the many initial tasks and demands of settlement. The difficulty of this task affects every aspect of their identities and has had a profound impact on their settlement process. A lack of language proficiency, especially the level of language required for post-secondary and professional programs affects not only their success in gaining acceptance to suitable education programs and employment, but also their relationships and their sense of belonging in Canadian society. Although there are studies that document the experiences of students in ESL programs, there are few that extend this discussion to the exploration of how language, learning and identity are linked and intertwined.

Final Words

A few years ago, I was involved in community-based programs designed for new immigrants from Afghanistan, and through these, I heard a number of stories about their experiences of migration and settlement. At one point, I was speaking to one gentleman who had been in Canada for a while, and he told me a story that caught my attention. He said that when he first arrived here, one of the things he was determined to do, was to keep his identity as an Afghan intact. He wanted to be able to take advantage of new opportunities in Canada, but he didn't want to lose a sense of who he was. But as he began to settle, he encountered a lot of challenges. At some point, he decided that his approach was not quite working out, and that he would have to give up some things he had been holding onto. This struggle that he spoke about, of having to give up some aspects of his identity, was also reflected in the lives of the Afghan women in the mentoring program I was involved in. From them, I had also heard many similar stories, and I began to think more about the process of identity renegotiation that new immigrants have to engage in, and these musings about shifts in identity led me to the questions of this research.

These questions about identity also resonated with my own experiences of coming to Canada as a teenager many years ago. Of course, my challenges were very different compared to the challenges faced by women arriving as refugees from a war torn country, but the process of having to negotiate the shifts in identity reminded me of the shifts that I had to renegotiate at that stage in my life.

My research questions in this study focused on exploring the experiences of women who fled from war and unrest in Afghanistan. My objectives were to relate these

migration experiences to the ways in which they renegotiated their identities and re-constructed their lives in Canada. To provide a context for this study, I looked at the complex historical and political situation in Afghanistan to see how this may have shaped the women's lives before they left the country, as well as their settlement process. For my theoretical framework, I used postcolonial theories of diaspora, identity, hybridity and liminality. These theories speak to issues of migrant identity, and I felt that this body of work was a good fit for the questions I was investigating. For my methodology I used primarily a narrative inquiry framework. Narrative inquiry can be used to understand the specific experiences of individuals through their stories about a particular event of importance in their lives, such as migration for example, as well as the meaning they ascribe to these events, within the social, historical and cultural contexts that have shaped them.

What emerged in my findings were the significant aspects of identity that the women renegotiated through the process of migration. These aspects centred on education, work and family. Shifts in one aspects of identify created shifts in other aspects of their lives, demonstrating that the process of identity renegotiation is a complex one, full of tensions, contradictions and ambivalence.

In my analysis of the findings, one of the areas I explored was the concept of liminal spaces from postcolonial theories. The idea of the liminal as being an in-between space seems to fit well with the experiences of migration. There can be many liminal spaces of migration, and one of these is the space in which the work of renegotiating new identities and subject positions takes place. I wanted to explore how well the conceptualization of liminal spaces could be applied in this situation. These spaces have

been described by post-colonial theorists as being generative and full of potential, and I did see this aspect of the liminal space emerge when the women spoke about how migration has provided them with opportunities to choose courses of action that may not have been possible to them in Afghanistan. For example, the women spoke about the higher levels of education and the new careers that they were able to envision for themselves. The women have taken on new roles in their families, leading to an increased sense of their own capabilities. Shifts in family relationships and the process of having to renegotiate these, difficult as they have been, have also opened up a sense of agency and provided new and diverse perspectives and ways of being in the world and of relating to others.

The stories that the women told me about these new aspects of their lives did seem to confirm the generative and creative aspects of a liminal space. However, there are also other aspects of this liminal space that emerged. The women in this study faced a number of structural issues such as discrimination in recognition of credentials and work experience, difficulties in finding employment as well as language issues. These constraints restrict the potential of the liminal space of identity renegotiation, suggesting that this liminal space is not always unfettered and limitless, but is in fact constrained by the many structural and systemic barriers that the women encounter. As Loomba (2005) suggests, conceptualization of the liminal spaces may have a "universalizing tendency" (p. 150) that ignores the ways in which women's subjectivities are fashioned by, for example, gender and class, as well as other contexts.

Finally, I looked at some implications of these findings for issues in a couple of areas. The first of these is the need to consider the women's multiple subject positions

and the tensions and contradictions within these subject positions in learning environments. And the second is that the 'homeplace' is an important site for learning.

For me, the impetus for this study came from the need to address a problem I encountered in a learning environment. As an adult educator, interested in how theorizing can contribute to my practice, through this study, I sought out theories and frameworks that could tease out the nuances of the issue I was considering, as well as provide strategies for action. What I would like to be able to do, then, is take the insights from this study back into various learning contexts, perhaps both the specific one in which I first encountered some of these issues, as well other broader contexts in teaching and learning environments.

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APPENDIX A:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

Renegotiating Identities and Re-Imagining Lives:
Exploring the Migration Experiences of Afghan Women

Information Letter

My name is Zenobia Jamal. I am a student in the Master's program in the department of Educational Policy Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. I am doing the study described in this letter for my master's thesis.

My area of study is adult education and learning, particularly how adults learn from their life experiences. The purpose of this study is to understand what you learned from the process of migrating from Afghanistan and settling in Canada. I am particularly interested in the learning that occurs as identities change in the migration and settlement process, for example, your sense of self, your relationships with friends, family and others, and your sense of belonging in society.

I will use the information that you provide in my thesis. I may also use it in journal articles and conference presentations.

If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to interview you. I would like to conduct two or three individual interviews. I would also like to conduct one group interview with the other women participating in this project. Each individual and group interview will take about one hour. I will audio tape each interview and transcribe it.

If you wish, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of the interview. When you receive the transcript, you can make changes to the transcripts or remove any information you don't want included in the study. I will keep the audio tapes and transcripts confidential and in a safe location. After five years, I will destroy the tapes and transcripts.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even after you have agreed to participate in the study, you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use the data you have given me. I will keep your identity completely confidential and will not use your real name at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 450-0173 or by email at zjamal@ualberta.ca. or my supervisor Dr. Donna M. Chovanec at 492-3690 or by email at donna.chovanec@ualberta.ca

APPENDIX B:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent

☐ I have read the information letter and I agree to participate in this project.

Please choose one of the following:

☐ I WISH to see a transcript of the interview.

☐ I DO NOT WISH to see a transcript of the interview.

_____ _____ _____

Participant's Name (please print) Signature Date

For return of transcript:

Participant's email address: _____

OR

Participant's address : _____

_____

_____

_____ _____ _____

Researcher's Name (please print) Signature Date

APPENDIX C:

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Renegotiating Identities and Re-Imagining Lives:
Exploring the Migration Experiences of Afghan Women

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Age: _____

Marital status: _____

Number of Children: _____

Ages of Children: _____

Education before arriving in Canada:

_____

Occupation before arriving in Canada:

_____

When did you leave Afghanistan? _____

When did you arrive in Canada? _____

Education after arriving in Canada:

_____

Occupation after arriving in Canada:

_____

APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview guide

I will start the interview with an explanation of the purpose of the study, as stated in the information letter:

My area of study is adult education and learning, particularly how adults learn from their life experiences. The purpose of this study is to understand what you learned from the process of migrating from Afghanistan and settling in Canada. I am particularly interested in the learning that occurs as identities change in the migration and settlement process, for example, your sense of self, your relationships with friends, family and others, and your sense of belonging in society.

After explaining the purpose of the study, I will invite the participant to start her story wherever she wishes. I will use the following probes only as guides and will follow the thread of the participant's story, while at all times keeping in mind the purpose of the research.

Pre-Migration

Probes: Ask about life in Afghanistan through the different periods of political upheaval, including educational background, employment experience, important relationships and community and societal roles.

Migration

Probes: Ask about the situation that led to migration and the process of moving, about any challenges or fears during the move to Canada and about what she learnt through this process.

Post migration – Initial experiences

Probes: Ask about initial experiences when arriving in Canada, immediate challenges with education and employment and what was learnt through this process.

Post migration – Sense of self and relationships

Probes: Ask how her sense of self changed (or is changing) in the settlement period, and to describe this change, how important relationships and roles within these relationships changed and about any shifts in values and beliefs in the settlement process. Ask about what she learnt through this process.